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CONTENTS / SOMMAIRE

- p 1-2 **Summary notes**
- p 2 **Résumés**
- p 2-38 **Developping events
Revue de presse :**
- p 2-9 **Armenia
Arménie**
- p 9-15 **Azerbaijan
Azerbaïdjan**
- p 15-19 **Nagorno Karabakh
Haut Karabagh**
- p 19-23 **Georgia
Georgie**
- p 23-27 **Adjarie
Adjaria**
- p 27-30 **Abkhazia
Abkhazie**
- p 30-31 **South Ossetia
Ossetie du Sud**
- p 31-33 **Javakhk
Djavakhk**
- p 34-36 **Chechnya
Tchéchénie**
- p 36-37 **Ingushetia
Ingouchie**
- p 38 **Daghestan
Daghestan**
- p 38 **Krasnodar
Krasnodar**

SUMMARY NOTES

The conflict between President Saakashvili and Aslan Abashidze finally erupted on March 15 when the Georgian president was prevented from entering Adjaria by armed groups that cited Tbilissi's hostilities toward the rebel governor of the autonomous republic. For some time, Abashidze has been issuing warnings and has appealed to potential allies to help preserve his power and the autonomy of Adjaria. Russia, had initially warned Tbilissi against the use of force against Adjaria, but quickly moved to position itself in the role of mediator between the two presidents.

In the midst of escalating tensions from both sides, and repeated calls by the United States and Europe to find a political solution to the crisis, the new Georgian president took control of the situation not by force but by repeating the rose revolution in the Adjarian territory; an Adjarian opposition group emerged, contesting the authoritative methods of Aslan Abashidze, and in the tumult of street demonstrations and acts of repression, enabled the overthrow of the regime. Aslan Abashidze resigned on May 5, and immediately left for Moscow accompanied by the president of the Russian Security Council Igor Ivanov. Following this resignation and prior to dissolving, the Supreme Council of the autonomous republic voted to abolish the post of president, and called for new parliamentary elections within 40 days. President Saakashvili, named Levan Varsholamidze as head of the new temporary Council.

The true impact of these events, however, lies in the official structure that **Georgia** will adopt: the Council of Europe, through its secretary-general Walter Schimmer, has from the very start of the crisis called upon the Georgian authorities to choose a structure that takes into account the country's ethnic diversity and minorities. Following the resignation of Abashidze, the pressures dramatically increased on the Adjarians to obtain widespread support for a referendum abolishing the autonomous status of the republic.

Naturally, this turn of events in Adjaria caused the authorities of **South Ossétia** concern about the possibility of a similar internal revolt encouraged by Tbilissi in that secessionist republic. Though denied by the Georgian authorities, these fears nevertheless did cause movements in the Ossetian leadership who, on the day after the May 23 legislative elections, threatened to soon join **North Ossétia /Alanie**, a republic within the Russian Federation. In **Abkhazia**, the fear of armed conflict combined with a possible uprising precipitated by Georgia put the leaders on guard. The growing denials of Georgian authorities reflects a tense atmosphere at the very least, as well as a war of information carried out by the protagonists to legitimize their future actions.

Declarations regarding the violated rights of key minorities in Abkhazia (Greeks, Armenians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Russians etc.), their denial by the authorities,

declarations regarding a possible armed aggression by Georgian forces and their denial, rumours of the Cossack army aggressing against the inhabitants of the Gali region may all be, observers say, predictive events of important political and military consequence.

The situation is equally tense in the mainly Armenian region of **Djavakhk** (part of "Samtskhe Javakheti"). In early March, organizations in the region submitted an official request to the Council of Europe protesting against Tbilissi's failure to carry out its commitments to the Council, marked in particular by Tbilissi's total lack of interest in problems related to Djavakhk, whose cultural and economic characteristics are not taken into account and where unemployment and poverty have reached a dangerous level. The Armenian organizations invoke the need for a federal structure for Georgia that would grant to Djavakhk constitutionally-recognized autonomy.

RESUMES

Le conflit opposant le président Saakashvili et Aslan Abashidze, a enfin éclaté au grand jour lorsque, le 15 mars le président géorgien a été interdit d'entrée en Adjarie par des groupes armés, déclenchant les hostilités de Tbilissi contre le gouverneur rebelle de la république autonome. Depuis quelque temps Abashidze lançait des avertissements et appelait à l'aide des alliés éventuels pour sauver son pouvoir et l'autonomie de l'Adjarie. La Russie avait dans un premier temps, mis en garde Tbilissi contre l'usage de la force contre l'Adjarie, mais a rapidement voulu endosser un rôle de médiateur entre les deux présidents. Devant l'escalade des mesures vexatoires de part et d'autre, et les appels répétés des Etats Unis et de l'Europe à trouver une solution politique à la crise, la reprise en main de la situation par le nouveau président géorgien ne s'est pas faite par la force mais par la répétition de

la révolution rose en territoire Adjare ; une opposition adjare s'est révélée au grand jour contestant les méthodes autoritaires d'Aslan Abashidze, et dans le tumulte des manifestations de rue et des actes de répression, a permis le renversement du régime. Aslan Abashidze a démissionné le 5 mai, et est immédiatement parti pour Moscou en compagnie du président du conseil de sécurité russe Igor Ivanov. Suite à cette démission, et avant de se dissoudre, le Conseil suprême de la république autonome a voté l'abolition du poste de président, et programmé de nouvelles élections parlementaires sous 40 jours. Le président Saakashvili, a nommé Levan Varsholamidze à la tête d'un nouveau Conseil intérimaire.

L'enjeu principal de ces événements paraît cependant être ailleurs. Il s'agit de la structure étatique dont la nouvelle **Géorgie** devra se doter : le Conseil de l'Europe ne s'était pas trompé lorsque dès le début de la crise, par la voix de son secrétaire général, Walter Schwimmer, il faisait appel aux autorités géorgiennes de choisir une structure tenant compte de la diversité ethnique et des minorité du pays.

Dès la démission d'Abashidze, les pressions se sont multipliées sur les Adjares afin d'obtenir l'accord d'un grand nombre pour un référendum abolissant le statut d'autonomie de la république.

Et tout naturellement, l'expérience adjare du président Saakashvili a pu susciter les craintes des autorités de **l'Ossétie du Sud** de voir se répéter chez eux le scénario d'une révolte interne encouragée dans la république sécessionniste par Tbilissi. Démenties par les autorités géorgiennes, ces craintes ont néanmoins suscité des remous chez les dirigeants ossètes qui, au lendemain des élections législatives du 23 mai, ont menacé de s'unir dans un avenir proche à **l'Ossétie du Nord /Alanie**, république membre de la Fédération de Russie.

En **Abkhazie**, la crainte d'une agression armée dans la foulée d'un éventuel soulèvement provoqué par la Géorgie a mis les dirigeants sur leurs gardes. Le nombre grandissant de démentis aux affirmations géorgiennes reflètent

pour le moins une atmosphère tendue, plus, une guerre de l'information que mènent les protagonistes pour légitimer leurs futures actions.

Aussi, les déclarations sur les droits bafoués des minorités importantes en Abkhazie (Grecs, Arméniens, Estoniens, Ukrainiens, Russes etc...), leur démenti par les intéressés, celles sur une éventuelle agression armée par les forces géorgiennes et leur démenti, les rumeurs sur l'agression des habitants de la région de Gali par des forces armées cosaques sont perçus par les observateurs comme autant de manœuvres qui présagent de nouveaux événements lourds de conséquences politiques et militaires.

La situation est tendue également dans la région majoritairement arménienne du **Djavakhk** (partie de « Samtskhe Javakheti »). Les organisations de la région ont adressé début mars une demande officielle au Conseil de l'Europe protestant contre les manquements de Tbilissi à ses engagements auprès de cette institution, marqués en particulier par l'absence totale d'intérêt par Tbilissi pour les problèmes de la région, dont les particularités culturelles et économiques ne sont pas pris en compte et où le chômage et la pauvreté atteignent désormais un seuil dangereux. Les organisations arméniennes évoquent la nécessité d'une structure fédérale de la Géorgie qui accorderait au Djavakhk une autonomie reconnue par la Constitution.

DEVELOPPING EVENTS / REVUE DE PRESSE

ARMENIA / ARMENIE

03/01/04 – Slain Armenian officer buried - RFE/RL NEWSLINE

Lieutenant Gurgen Markarian, who was killed in his sleep on 19 February, apparently by an Azerbaijani fellow participant in a NATO training program in Budapest, was buried in Yerevan's Yerablur military cemetery on 28 February, Noyan Tapan reported.

Among the hundreds who attended the funeral was Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian, who attributed the killing to intensifying anti-Armenian propaganda in Azerbaijan. Speaking in Vienna on 26 February, Douglas Davidson, who is deputy U.S. representative to the OSCE Permanent Council, appealed to both Armenia and Azerbaijan not to allow the killing to impede efforts to resolve the Karabakh conflict, Turan reported. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani online newspaper zerkalo.az reported on 28 February that no fewer than four public committees have been established to defend the rights of the suspected murderer, Ramil Safarov, whom public opinion reportedly regards as "an example for our youth."

03/02/04 - UNDP, Armenian government launch joint project against "glass ceiling" - RIA Novosti

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the government of Armenia have launched a joint project against what is known as "glass ceiling." "The level of women's participation in decision-making in Armenia, both at the local and the national levels, must be raised," said UNDP Resident Coordinator Lise Grande. According to the UNDP Office in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, Ms. Grande and Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Agvan Vardanyan signed a document on the launch of this project Monday. It is entitled "Gender and Political Programs in the South Caucasus: Georgia and Armenia."

The goal behind this project is to promote the development of gender policies in Armenia and Georgia, initiating gender dialogue and paving the way for regional cooperation in the field.

A paper on regional gender strategies will be prepared on the basis of this newly launched project, to be implemented in three years' time.

03/05/04 - Armenian media body outraged by new accreditation rules - Mediamax news agency

The Armenian National Press Club issued a statement in Yerevan today saying that the possible change of power in the country was

"a topical issue". Mediamax news agency reports that the reason for the statement was the procedure for accrediting journalists in state agencies approved by the Armenian government on 4 March. "This document has fully demonstrated how frightened and horrified this regime is of the free press. By restricting the right to access and disseminate information at a time when Azerbaijan has launched anti-Armenian propaganda, when there is a social crisis and when crime and corruption are rife, the incumbent authorities are only trying to delay the moment of imminent responsibility for their wrongdoings and mistakes," the National Press Club said in the statement.

(...)

03/06/04 - Armenian authorities brush aside Azerbaijan's war rhetoric - ArmenPress

Armenian president Robert Kocharian said Saturday that Azerbaijan's war-rhetoric does not mean that it may resume hostilities, but admitted that theoretically a new war may erupt, as long as the opposition between the two countries over Nagorno Karabagh remains unsettled. Chances for a new war, according to him are anchored on the balance of forces in the region, on Armenia's economic development and military capacities. "Armenia's security depends on domestic stability, consolidation of the nation and the army's efficiency," the president told reporters while attending a commemoration ceremony of the 16-th anniversary of Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan's industrial city of Sumgait in 1988. (...)

03/10/04 - NATO chief hopes officer's killing not to threaten cooperation with Armenia - Mediamax news agency

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has sent a letter to Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan in connection with the killing of Armenian Lt Gurgen Markaryan by an Azerbaijani serviceman in Budapest on 19 February. The press service of the Armenian Foreign Ministry quotes the NATO secretary-general as saying in the letter that he was

"deeply shocked by the brutal killing of the Armenian officer" and asked to pass his sympathy to his family, Mediamax reports. "As you know, relevant Hungarian agencies are conducting a detailed investigation into the incident and I am convinced that they will do their best to find out all the circumstances of the killing and to make sure that justice is administered. I myself will follow the course of the investigation and the subsequent trial," Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said.

(...)

03/11/04 - Uruguay Parliament Recognizes Armenian Genocide - ASBAREZ ONLINE

The lower chamber of Uruguay's parliament approved a bill on March 10, which indirectly recognizes the Armenian Genocide. The bill calls for April 24 to be "the commemoration day of Armenians martyred in 1915," and obligates the state owned media to "cover those events" on that day. There is no reference to "genocide" in the wording of the bill, though parliament speeches in favor of the bill did not avoid calling the genocide, a "genocide." The resolution will become a law with the president's signature.

In 2000, Uruguay's Senate unanimously passed a resolution marking "April 24 a national day of remembrance for the Armenian Genocide."

In 1965, the Armenian National Committee of Uruguay advanced the passage of an Armenian Genocide resolution in Uruguay's parliament--to mark the first time a country officially recognized the genocide of Armenians.

At the time, the author of that resolution Senator Dr. Alberto Sid, said that the bill aimed to register Uruguay's official position on the Armenian Genocide as a crime against humanity.

Interestingly, the world's first April 24 demonstration also took place in Uruguay, in 1964.

03/18/04 - Armenian President sacks prosecutor-general - RFE/RL NEWSLINE

Robert Kocharian dismissed Aram Tamazian on 17 March from the post of prosecutor-general, to which he was appointed three years ago,

RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported.

No reason for the dismissal was cited, and Deputy Prosecutor-General Aghvan Hovsepian was named to succeed Tamazian. Hovsepian served as prosecutor-general between 1998 and late 1999, when he was constrained to step down in the wake of the October parliament shootings, in which eight senior officials were killed. Hovsepian has reportedly built up an extensive business empire that includes a leading dairy firm and a television channel.

03/22/04 - Armenia says Azerbaijan acknowledges existence of Paris, Key West Karabakh - Arminfo

"We are glad that Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Quliyev has at last admitted the existence of a document, albeit not signed, on agreements reached in Key-West and Paris [on Nagornyy Karabakh conflict]," Gamlet Gasparyan, spokesman for the Armenian Foreign Ministry, has said. He was asked by journalists to comment on Quliyev's statement that his Armenian counterpart, Vardan Oskanyan, should produce a document on the Key-West and Paris agreements. Quliyev said that "there is nothing to discuss since no agreements have been signed". "We have repeatedly stated that such a document exists, and that it has been drafted by the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group on resolving the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict, on the basis of talks between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Therefore, we consider this episode - on whether the document exists or not - to be over. "As for Quliyev's remarks that there was nothing to discuss since no agreements had been signed, I have to say that had it been signed, the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict would be settled by now. Nevertheless, since Azerbaijan acknowledges the fact that there were some agreements, we hope that the talks will continue in the future from where they left."

03/25/04 - Armenia considers key-west and Paris agreements on Karabakh settlement exhausted - ARKA News Agency

Armenia considers Key-West and Paris agreements on Karabakh settlement exhausted, says the statement spread today by RA MFA press secretary Gamlet Gasparian. According to the statement, written document considering given agreements was not prepared by Armenia, but by OSCE MG and 'if Azeri party is interested in their publication, let it turn to Minsk Group. The other thing is if it does not want to consider work in conflict settlement and its results for last years'.

Armenian administration called to Baku to observe agreements on conflict settlement achieved by the presidents in Paris and Key-West. Azeri president responded that there are no agreements between Baku and Yerevan considering Karabakh conflict settlement.

03/26/04 - Armenian minister urges Azeris not to turn officer's trial into "show" - Arminfo

Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan is sure that Azerbaijan will not succeed in making a "show" of the trial of Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov charged with killing an Armenian officer in Budapest, the minister told a news conference in Yerevan today. Asked about the possibility of such a turn of events, Vardan Oskanyan said he didn't see how the Azerbaijani side could do that because the crime is obvious and all evidence is against the Azerbaijani officer. "I think that all such attempts will have an opposite effect," the minister said and added that the Armenian side would monitor the way the trial is progressing. The minister also expressed the hope that the criminal would be punished severely. Passage omitted: Known details of the Budapest killing

03/30/04 - More Armenian opposition activists arrested - RFE/RL NEWSLINE

Five more members of the opposition alliance Artarutian were arrested early on 29 March in the wake of clashes the previous day at an opposition demonstration in

Giumri between Artarutian supporters and plainclothes police, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The regional prosecutor told RFE/RL that the five, together with four men detained on 28 March, will be charged with hooliganism. The leaders of the political parties aligned in Artarutian met in Yerevan on 29 March to discuss how to prevent further "provocations" by police. They again affirmed that they will launch mass protests in mid-April with the aim of forcing the present Armenian leadership to resign.

03/30/04 - Rights activist beaten in Armenia - Associated Press Worldstream

A representative of a leading human rights organization was beaten by assailants on Tuesday and blamed the Armenian authorities for the attack, which left him hospitalized in serious condition. Mikael Danielyan, the chairman of the Armenian Helsinki Foundation, was attacked by four assailants who cornered him in an alley near his home, according to his wife and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights.

Danielyan was knocked to the ground and beaten for about 10 minutes, the Vienna-based rights group said. It said it was "very concerned about (the) brutal physical attack" on Danielyan, who was hospitalized in serious condition. Danielyan, whose life was not in danger, said from the hospital that he blames the authorities for the attack, which came shortly after he criticized President Robert Kocharian in a published interview. (...)

03/30/04 - Armenian opposition stops boycott of parliament sessions - Mediamax news agency

Deputies from the Justice and National Unity opposition parliamentary factions stopped boycotting meetings of the Armenian National Assembly today. Deputies representing the Justice and National Unity blocks registered today for taking part in the National Assembly's meetings, Mediamax's parliamentary correspondent reports. According to talks in the corridors, the opposition deputies, who boycotted Armenian parliament

meetings in February, decided to return to the session hall in order to hamper plans of the ruling coalition. The latter, having majority in the parliament, intentionally did not secure a quorum in the National Assembly today. (...)

04/05/04 - Armenian opposition press secretary arrested - Arminfo

Suren Surenyants, member of the political council of the Anrapetutyun (Republic) Party responsible for relations with the press, was arrested last night. A member of the political council of the Anrapetutyun Party (Republic) and deputy of the Armenian National Assembly, Smbat Ayvazyan, told an Arminfo correspondent today that Suren Surenyants had been arrested in his father-in-law's house. Without any explanations he was forced into a police vehicle and taken to the main police station of the city. They failed to contact his lawyer because the arrest was carried out at night, Ayvazyan noted.

04/05/04 - Armenian opposition set to remove "illegal" authorities - leaders - Noyan Tapan news agency

The opposition is planning to stage a massive protest action in Yerevan's Freedom Square at 1600 [1100 GMT] on 9 April. The action will be aimed at changing power in Armenia, leader of the Justice bloc Stepan Demirchyan and chairman of the National Unity party Artashes Gegamyan told a press conference at the National Assembly on 5 April. The Justice bloc and the National Unity party again confirmed their resolution to lead the processes aimed at executing a national requirement, i.e. the removal of the illegal regime, the establishment of the constitutional order in Armenia and the formation of the legal authorities, the parties said in a joint statement.

Artashes Gegamyan said the authorities "have completely lost their heads which can be proven by mass arrests of opposition activists over the last two days". (...)

04/12/04 - Armenian opposition say over 250 arrested, "junta in its death throes" - Mediamax news agency

MP Viktor Dallakyan, member of the opposition Justice bloc, said in Yerevan today that "the Armenian authorities are deliberately heightening tension in the country. It will be them who will bear the responsibility for a possible negative outcome."

Speaking at a briefing at the headquarters of the People's Party today, Dallakyan said that some 250 people had been "unlawfully detained" over a sit-in and protests on Freedom Square. Dallakyan said that Tatul Manaseryan and Vardan Mkrtchyan, MPs of the Armenia's National Assembly from the Justice faction, were taken to police station today. The two intend to get in touch with the speaker of the National Assembly, Artur Bagdasaryan, and demand that measures be taken to free them (...)

04/13/04 - Armenian deputy speaker says room remains for dialogue with opposition - Mediamax news agency

Armenian Deputy Speaker Vahan Ovanesyan said today that there is still room for dialogue with opposition leaders. According to Mediamax news agency, Ovanesyan told journalists today that yesterday's events, particularly the dispersal of the opposition rally in central Yerevan, were the consequence of the fact that "the opposition has overestimated its own capabilities and made maximalist demands". Ovanesyan recalled that representatives of the ruling coalition, particularly the [Armenian Revolutionary Federation] Dashnaksutyun, had recently kept suggesting to the opposition that they begin dialogue.

04/16/04 - Armenian civic groups protest arrests, police brutality - RFE/RL

Some 1,000 people attended a demonstration in Yerevan on 15 April to protest the police brutality against and arrests of protesters on 13 April, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. At the same time, participants stressed that their protest should not be construed as

an endorsement of the opposition campaign to force the president's resignation. At least 115 people were arrested on 13 April, including three parliament deputies who were subsequently released. Police say 12 people were sentenced to up to 15 days' detention, and that three others, including former Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutiunian, have been remanded in custody in connection with a separate criminal investigation. Also on 15 April, police vacated the headquarters of Sargsian's Hanrapetutian party and he emerged from hiding, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported.

04/16/04 - Sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorist act in Armenian parliament committed suicide - Arminfo

Vram Galstian, sentenced to life imprisonment for the terrorist act in the Armenian parliament on October 27 committed suicide in the Nubarashen prison at about 11.00 a.m. today. As reported in the press office of the RA Ministry of Justice, V. Galstian hanged himself with a sheet. The incident was brought to the notice of relatives of the deceased, RA Office of Public Prosecutor as well as a number of advocacy and public organizations engaged in issues of penitentiary service. Criminal case has been initiated.

04/19/04 - Turkey to Keep Border with Armenia Closed - ASBAREZ ONLINE

Turkey reinforced its ties with neighboring Azerbaijan on Monday when the Turkish foreign minister said his country would not re-open its border with Armenia.

"For now, it is out of the question to re-open the Turkish-Armenian border," Abdullah Gul said, days after visiting Azeri President Ilham Aliyev.

Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 to support Baku in its war against Yerevan over the Mountainous Karabagh enclave. Azerbaijan had feared that Turkey would re-open its border with Armenia in a bid to please the European Union, which it is hoping to join. Aliyev said in a recent interview that relations with Ankara would suffer if Turkey again opened the border. (...)

04/20/04 – Armenian Prime Minister condemns “coup attempt” - RFE/RL NEWSLINE

The use by police of brute force to disperse protest participants in Yerevan early on 13 April was justified because "this was a coup attempt, and the authorities must take appropriate reactions within the legal framework," Prime Minister Andranik Markarian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on 19 April. Markarian reaffirmed the offers of dialogue with the opposition made in recent weeks by the three-party coalition government, but at the same time categorically rejected the opposition's repeated calls for a nationwide referendum of confidence in President Kocharian.

04/20/04 - Yerevan, Baku continue negotiations on Karabakh conflict - Interfax

Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian told a press conference in Yerevan that his meeting with the Azerbaijani foreign minister in Prague last week "was useful, but the dialogue is not finished yet." He said that Armenia "did not manage to clearly understand the Azerbaijani side's final approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict." "In the current situation, the only thing I can report about the meeting is that it was agreed to conduct another meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in mid-May," Oskanian said. He also said that at the meeting in Prague, the co-chairmen of the OSCE's Minsk group did not offer the sides any new ways to settle the conflict.

Talking about political destabilization in Armenia, Oskanian said that regrettably, "the internal political situation in Armenia may be misunderstood by Baku." This may lead to a change in Azerbaijan's position on settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, he said.

04/21/04 – No Armenian can stay in Azerbaijan - Arminfo

UN HCR Baku Office has denied refugee status to the two Armenians seeking asylum in Azerbaijan, reports 525 newspaper (Baku). The office says that both Armenians were born in Baku. To remind, Apr 8 Roman Teryan and Artur Apresyan crossed the Azeri border and asked

for refuge complaining that they live in poverty in Armenia and are afraid of possible war and current developments in that country. They wish to go to a third country. Azeri politologists and NGOs say that the Armenians can not stay in Azerbaijan. They say that UN HCR Baku Office is partial and ignores the gist of the problem. In fact no Armenians can live in Baku now. The above turncoats must be sent by the office to a third country. Armenians can return to Azerbaijan only if Armenia withdraws its troops from the occupied Azeri lands. The president of Organization for Liberation of Karabakh Akif Nagi is also against keeping the Armenians in Baku. "As far as I know many Armenians come to Baku under various names. We must not allow this as the Armenians have long been implementing a policy of genocide against the Azeris." "The Budapest murder of an Armenian officer by an Azeri one is one more proof that no Armenian can live in Baku."

Meanwhile the chairman of the Azeri national Committee of Helsinki Civil Assembly Arzu Abdulaev says that each person who left Azerbaijan because of the conflict has the right to return to his native country. This is what International Human Rights Convention says. "Naturally each citizen of Azerbaijan can return to his native country but the current realities exclude this possibility. 10 years have passed but the international community has not attained the settlement of the Karabakh problem. Over 1 mln displaced people are forced to live in hard conditions."

04/21/04 – Canada recognizes the Armenian genocide - Armenian National Committee of Canada PRESS RELEASE

The House of Commons adopts bill M-380 presented by Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral Ottawa, April 21st, 2004 - The House of Commons adopted a motion recognizing the Armenian Genocide by a majority of 153 votes. The motion was presented by Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (M.P. Laval Center) and seconded by Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (M.P. Brampton-Center), Mr. Jason Kenney (M.P. Calgary-South-East) and Mrs. Alexa McDonough (M.P. Halifax).

The passing of this resolution was the culmination of a 25 year process which encompassed similar resolutions being passed by city councils, provinces, and the Canadian Senate (July 13, 2002). "This is a victory for truth and justice," stated Dr. Girair Basmadjian, president of the Armenian National Committee of Canada. (...)

04/22/04 – US envoy urges progress in Turkish-Armenian border opening - Arminfo

"We hope that progress will be reached in lifting the blockade of the Armenian border by Turkey," US ambassador to Armenia John Ordway told a press conference today, commenting on numerous reports about the possibility of lifting the blockade in the run-up to a NATO summit in Istanbul in June. A lot of work has to be done to prepare for the summit and for US President George Bush's visit to Turkey, Ordway said. "We have a very busy agenda to discuss with the Turkish government. Progress in the opening of the Armenian border and establishment of relations between Turkey and Armenia will be one of those issues," he said.

04/23/04 – Armenia organizations condemn racial manifestations in Russia against Armenians - ArmenPress

Several Armenian non governmental and human rights organizations reacted today strongly to a media report that a 10-year-old Armenian boy was set on fire as a result of an apparent racist attack in the northern Russian city of Kostroma, reportedly by a group of so-called "skinheads."

In a statement addressed to the Russian embassy in Yerevan and Armenian foreign ministry, issued today, they say the Kostroma incident was not the first and "judging from alarming reports from Russia not the last one." Eyewitnesses told the police in Kostroma that two friends, aged 10 and 11 had dropped into a grocery store after classes. A group of youths was apparently waiting for them outside. As the boys came out of the shop, the attackers splashed gasoline over one of them and set him on fire. Luckily, some passers-

by helped the boy and quickly extinguished the fire. He was then rushed to hospital. Doctors said the boy had burns to his face and hands. The attackers fled the scene. (...)

04/24/04 – President Bush fails to honor pledge to recognize Armenian Genocide for the fourth time - Armenian National Committee of America PRESS RELEASE

President Bush, ignoring calls from over 190 U.S. legislators, failed, once again, to honor his campaign pledge to properly characterize the Armenian Genocide as "genocide," reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). In a statement issued today, on April 24th, the annual day of remembrance for the Armenian Genocide, the President again resorted to the use of evasive and euphemistic terminology to obscure the reality of Turkey's Genocide against the Armenian people between 1915-1923. This year's statement praised the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC,) the failed State Department funded initiative devised to derail progress toward international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The effort was universally rejected by Armenians in the U.S., Armenia and around the world. (...)

04/24/04 – Armenia commemorates genocide victims- ArmenPress

Armenian president Robert Kocharian, members of the Armenian government, representatives of political parties, diplomatic corps and top clerics from the Armenian Apostolic Church laid wreathes today at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial in the capital Yerevan to commemorate 1.5 million victims of the 1915 genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians from all parts of the world walked today up the Tsitsernakaberd hill in Yerevan to the 1915 Genocide Memorial on the annual day of remembrance for Armenians massacred in the Ottoman Empire. Ceremonies are

also held in Armenian communities throughout the world. (...)

04/27/04 - Armenian opposition halts dialogue with govt - Interfax

The Armenian opposition on Tuesday decided to suspend its dialogue with the coalition made up of pro- government parties, Viktor Dallakyan, a secretary with the opposition parliamentary faction Justice, told a news conference. Negotiations conducted earlier on Tuesday at the initiative of the parliamentary speaker involved the heads of the ruling coalition, which includes the Republican Party of Armenia, and the parties Orinats Erkir and Dashnaksutyun. "Negotiations require good will from both sides. However, because the ruling coalition has no such will, we believe it is inexpedient to continue the dialogue," Dallakyan said.

04/27/04 – Armenian coalition parties, opposition embark on dialogue - RFE/RL NEWSLINE

At the initiative of parliament speaker Artur Baghdasarian, representatives of the three-party ruling coalition met on 26 April at the parliament building with leaders of the opposition Artarutiun alliance to discuss ways of resolving the tensions generated by the opposition's ongoing campaign to force President Robert Kocharian to resign, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The opposition National Accord Party, which has co-sponsored that campaign, did not send a representative to the talks as its chairman, Artashes Geghamian, is currently attending the spring session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Although no concrete agreement was reached at the talks, an unnamed Artarutiun member characterized them as "very constructive and friendly" and said they will resume on 27 April. Interfax on 26 April quoted leading Artarutiun member Viktor Dallakian as saying that the movement will continue to demand the release of persons arrested following an opposition protest in Yerevan on 12-13 April, suspending the criminal case opened against Artarutiun, and providing opposition leaders with live airtime on public television.

04/29/04 – Council of Europe offers to mediate in Armenia - RFE/RL NEWSLINE

Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer appealed on 28 April to the Armenian authorities and opposition to resume the dialogue broken off the previous day, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Schwimmer told journalists in Strasbourg that the council has successfully sponsored such dialogue in other countries, and that his permanent representative in Yerevan, Natalia Voutova, is prepared to mediate in such talks. Schwimmer also condemned the recourse by the Armenian authorities to excessive force to disperse opposition protesters in Yerevan earlier this month. But at the same time he urged the opposition to "return to parliament" rather than persist with its campaign to try to pressure the country's leadership by street demonstrations. (...)

04/30/04 – Armenian media "not free" - AZG Daily

New York-based media freedom monitoring 'Freedom House' organization has released April 28 its annual report on 'Freedom of the Press 2004: A Global Survey of Media Independence', in which Armenia shares places 135 to 139 in the list of overall 193 countries. Together with Central African Republic, The Maldives, Mauritania, Singapore and Ivory Coast, Armenia is ranked as 'not free', in view of media situation and pressure upon it by state agencies in the year 2003. Denmark is ranked number one in the list, having the freest media in the world. North Korea concludes the list as having the worst media freedom record. Among the former Soviet republics Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are ranked as 'partly free', whereas Turkmenistan, together with Cuba and North Korea, is among the last in the list.

04/30/04 – Pace threatens Armenia with sanctions - RFE/RL Newsline

In its 28 April resolution in response to recent developments in Armenia, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe criticized

reprisals against opposition demonstrators earlier this month as "contrary to the letter and spirit" of its earlier recommendations to the Armenian leadership, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported on 29 April. It called on the Armenian authorities to abolish "unjustified restrictions" on peaceful demonstrations; to release persons detained for participating in recent protests; and to investigate "human rights abuses" and report to the PACE the findings of that investigation. It further called for the Armenian government to submit by June a written report listing measures taken in response to the PACE demands or risk the suspension of Armenian parliamentarians' accreditation with the PACE. The resolution did not endorse or reject the Armenian opposition's demand for a nationwide vote of confidence in President Robert Kocharian, but appealed to both the authorities and opposition to "engage in a dialogue without preconditions."

05/05/04 - Armenian President signs into law a measure on rallies - Associated Press Worldstream

Armenian President Robert Kocharian signed into law on Wednesday on measure on public gatherings that limits where they can be held but that provides for penalizing officials if they block legitimate rallies.

The law came as Armenia undergoes a wave of opposition protests calling for Kocharian's resignation.

The law calls for rallies to be prohibited within 150 meters (about 500 feet) of places of strategic or state significance. That designation could include the presidential palace, where police forcefully broke up a large rally last month, injuring some demonstrators and detaining more than 100.

However, the measure also calls for says national and local officials can be subject to criminal or administrative punishment if they illegally hinder the organization of mass demonstrations.

Justice Minister David Arutyunian said the final version of the draft law took into account most of the changes recommended by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Among the

changes was elimination of a clause that would have considered journalists and other non-participants in a rally legally responsible in connection with a gathering's actions.

Artur Bagdasarian, speaker of the Armenian parliament, said that lawmakers couldn't address all of the opposition's complaints about the new law, calling some of them unrealistic. However, he said they could propose a parliamentary initiative to make changes or additions to the law.

05/10/04 - Armenian President not to attend NATO summit in Istanbul - ArmenPress

Ashot Kocharian, a spokesman for president Robert Kocharian (not a relation) who has marked today the first year in his tenure, told reporters that president Kocharian will visit Russia on May 13-15. "Armenian-Russian relations are of strategic-partnership nature and they are an important factor of securing economic growth and security for Armenia," the spokesman said, adding that bilateral relations have progressed during the last year, especially in economy.

He said during the visit Kocharian will confer a number of issues with president Putin, prime minister Mikhail Fradkov and also with chief managers of gas supplying companies to Armenia and with representatives of business community.

Armenian president Robert Kocharian will not travel to Turkish Istanbul in late June to attend a NATO summit, the spokesman said. He said Armenia will be represented by foreign minister Oskanian.

"This is not determined by Armenia-NATO relationship as they are now on the rise," the spokesman said, adding that Armenia's cooperation with NATO proceeds within the frameworks of Partnership for Peace program "and last year president Kocharian was in Brussels to meet with top NATO officials and also NATO secretary general visited Armenia last year." The spokesman said Kocharian's decision not to travel to Turkey hinges rather on the current level of Turkish-Armenian relations.

According to him, last year marked no major progress in Armenian-Turkish relations. Dialogue on the level of foreign ministers continued,

though. Armenia has always expressed its readiness to engage in dialogue without preconditions and establish multifaceted relationship with Turkey.

05/13/04 - OSCE welcomes contacts between Armenian authorities, opposition - Mediamax news agency

Vladimir Pryakhin, the head of the OSCE office in Yerevan and ambassador, has welcomed the resumption of contacts between the authorities and the opposition in Armenia.

"I call on both sides to engage in a genuine dialogue to settle the existing differences within the constitutional framework," Pryakhin said. He said that "a dialogue is the best way to reach mutual understanding and develop political stability", Mediamax news agency reports.

Pryakhin also called on the Armenian authorities to re-consider the cases of people detained during the recent demonstrations and to continue efforts to reform the Code of Administrative Violations. This would make it possible to eliminate the practice of administrative detentions, "which is incompatible with European standards", he said.

05/13/04 - Armenia and Iran agree to build US\$220 million gas pipeline - Associated Press Worldstream

Armenia and Iran on Thursday signed an agreement to build a \$220 pipeline that would bring Iranian gas to Armenia in exchange for electrical power supplies to Iran. The pipeline, expected to be launched by 2007, will cost Iran up to US\$120 million and Armenia around US\$100 million.

The long-awaited signing of the agreement comes after 12 years of negotiations between the two neighbors. The project had met resistance on the part of Russia and the United States. As the world's leading gas exporter, Russia wanted to preserve its influence in the region. The United States was uncomfortable with Armenia's contacts with Iran.

The building of the Iranian side of the pipeline will be financed by the country's national gas company, while companies have yet to bid for

the construction of the Armenian side.

05/14/04 - Armenia opposition turns down dialogue with ruling majority - ITAR-TASS

The Armenian opposition has refused to hold the dialogue with the ruling parliamentary majority. The pro-presidential coalition in turn did not want to use the word crisis to describe the situation in the country after the last year's presidential elections.

The coalition also has proposed to the opposition joining the lawmaking process, in particular taking part in debate of changes to the election code and the constitution. "The coalition is thus is trying to create an imitation of the return of the opposition to the parliament," a member of the oppositionist parliamentary faction Justice, Shavarsh Kocharyan, said. The opposition warned that it would not resume the dialogue until all of its activists are freed from detention prisons.

05/18/04 - Three Armenian demonstrators get prison terms for "hooliganism" - Noyan Tapan news agency

Sentences into the case of gross violation of public order have been passed with regard to three people arrested during the 28 March rally in Gyumri [northwestern Armenia].

Noyan Tapan news agency has learnt from the Armenian Prosecutor-General's Office press service that the first instance court of Shirak Region gave Martin Kazaryan a one-year sentence.

Ararat Petrosyan on 13 May was given one year in prison as well, but was given a trial period with the sentence suspended for a year. Gamlet Mkrtychyan was given nine months in prison on 13 May. A judge found three people guilty under the "hooliganism" Article of the Criminal Code.

05/27/04 - Protester sentenced in Armenia for hitting policeman with bottle - Associated Press Worldstream

A court in Armenia on Thursday convicted a man who hit a police officer with a plastic bottle during an

opposition protest last month that was forcefully broken up by authorities and sentenced him to 18 months in prison.

Edgar Arakelian was found guilty of using violence against a representative of the authorities. He was tried after televised footage showed him hitting an officer in the head with a water bottle during a protest outside parliament that was dispersed by police on April 13.

Arakelian pleaded guilty but said he had not been aware that he was hitting a law enforcement officer and that he delivered the blow by instinct because police were using tear gas and had hit him in the head with a truncheon.

The police officer Arakelian struck urged leniency, while prosecutors requested a sentence of 2 1/2 years. Arakelian's lawyer said he would appeal the decision.(...)

AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAIDJAN

03/08/04 - Azerbaijani President calls for revision of law on public television - RFE/RL Newsline

Ilham Aliyev has declined to sign into law a bill on public television that was adopted in its third reading in January, and has sent it back to parliament for further debate, Turan reported on 6 March. The Council of Europe and other international organizations have criticized the bill, the final version of which failed to incorporate any of their recommendations aimed at minimizing state control over the planned public broadcaster

03/09/04 - Libel damages threaten to bankrupt Azerbaijani opposition paper - RFE/RL Newsline

In six separate libel cases, courts have ordered the opposition newspaper "Yeni Musavat" to pay damages ranging from 5 million manats to 400 million manats (\$1,000-\$81,000) to prominent political figures, including Defense Minister Colonel General Safar Abiev and Agil Aliyev, a brother of the late President Heidar Aliyev,

Turan reported on 9 March. The total fines amount to some \$150,000, which will be deducted from the newspaper's sales and subscription revenue. Acting Editor in Chief Gabil Abbasoglu told Turan the courts were acting on orders from the presidential administration in a bid to silence the paper because of its coverage of the purported falsification of the 15 October presidential election.

03/10/04 - Azeri officer in Budapest gets lawyer - Baku Today

Hungarian lawyer Peter Zalay will defend Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov, who has been arrested in Budapest on charges of murdering Armenian officer, Turan News Agency said. Azeri lawyer Adil Ismayilov, who met with Zalay in Budapest said, in a TV interview, Zalay quite a responsible lawyer ,however, he said, one cannot be confident about the positive outcome of the case for the Azeri officer beforehand. Ismayilov, who visited Safarov on March 4 said, the Azeri officer has been charged with article 166 of Hungarian criminal code which stipulates for from between 10 - 15 years of imprisonment to life imprisonment.

03/11/04 - Azeri ombudsman urges interior chief to prevent police mistreatment - Azad Azarbaycan TV

[Presenter in studio] Ombudsman Elmira Suleymanova has appealed to Interior Minister Ramil Usubov over the rude treatment of citizens by the police. The Azerbaijani rights activist has sent another appeal to her Hungarian counterpart. (...)

03/13/04 - Military aid to Azerbaijan to guarantee Caspian security - US official - Trend news agency

Trend correspondent S. Agayeva: As a co-chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group for the Nagornyy Karabakh settlement, the USA cannot take anyone's side in the conflict, and it is impossible to use US military aid in the conflict, Trend news agency has quoted US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs

Elizabeth Jones as saying. Jones said that US military aid to Azerbaijan is to guarantee the security of the Caspian Sea. "There is a danger today that the Caspian Sea may turn into a transit area for terrorists, a route for the transportation of materials to produce weapons of mass destruction and other transnational threats. We have to increase the possibilities of Azerbaijani marine border guards to carry out a struggle against these threats," she said.

According to Jones, the modernization of an Azerbaijani air base, which is used by US aircraft for flights to Afghanistan, is another purpose of military aid. All this is to help the USA's fight against terrorism, she added. Jones believes that Armenia should not protest against military aid to Azerbaijan. "Neither Armenia, Russia nor any other regional state wants the Caucasus to be used for helping terrorists," she said. The US Department of State proposes to the Congress to allocate 8m dollars to Azerbaijan and 2m dollars to Armenia as military aid in the fiscal year 2004.

03/16/04 - More sentenced in Azerbaijan for postelection clashes - RFE/RL Newsline

Azerbaijan's Court for Grave Crimes passed sentence on 15 March on a further eight persons convicted in connection with the clashes in Baku between police and opposition supporters in the wake of the disputed 15 October presidential ballot, Turan reported. Four of the accused were released on probation, while the remaining four received prison sentences of between four and five years. To date, 17 people have been jailed in connection with the postelection violence, and 30 put on probation.

03/24/04 - Azerbaijan warns against opening of Turkey-Armenia border - ITAR-TASS News Agency

The European Union and some influential countries are exerting serious pressure on Turkey to make it open its border with Armenia, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said.

"If Turkey opens the border with Armenia, the resolution of the

Karabakh conflict will become impossible," he warned on Wednesday. "In his this Azerbaijan will lose a very important lever and further negotiations within the framework of the peace process will be impossible," the president told journalists. He believes this will halt negotiations. "If the interested parties genuinely want the Karabakh conflict to be resolved peacefully, they have to stop putting pressure on Turkey," Aliyev said. At the same time, he expressed confidence that Turkey will not give in to this pressure. "The Turkish-Azerbaijani brotherhood is above everything else both for us and for the people of Turkey," he said. Aliyev also criticised the OSCE Minsk Group for its inability to play a positive role in the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

"The position of the Minsk Group is not translated into efforts to resolve the conflict and boils down to watching the process," he said. (...)

03/29/04 - Azerbaijani officials reject Council of Europe recommendation - RFE/RL Newsline

Azerbaijani presidential administration head Ramiz Mekhtiev told journalists on 26 March that Baku will not comply with a request by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission to amend the composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Turan reported. Mekhtiev said that, as an independent state, Azerbaijan is under no obligation to comply with such suggestions. The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party currently has six representatives on the 15-person CEC, and can count on the support of three other members from small pro-regime political parties, giving it the required two-thirds majority.

03/29/04 - Azerbaijan cancels crucial talks on Karabagh - RFE/RL

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev has canceled his upcoming crucial meeting with his Armenian counterpart. Armenia had hoped the talks would serve to establish whether the Mountainous Karabagh conflict could be resolved in the foreseeable future. The decision

was announced late Wednesday amid renewed Azeri criticism of the American, French, and Russian mediators. President Ilham Aliyev again accused the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe of doing little to achieve a peaceful settlement of the dispute. He also warned ally Turkey against reopening its border with Armenia. Guliyev said that he will not travel to the Czech capital Prague to meet with Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian because the agenda of the talks scheduled for Monday has not been specified. (...)

03/31/04 - Day of Azeri genocide by Armenians is in fact day of prevention of Armenian pogroms in Baku - Arminfo

The day of the genocide of Azeris by the Armenians (Mar 31) alleged by the Azeri authorities is in fact the day of the prevention of the 1918 Armenian pogroms in Baku, says historian Vardan Khachatryan.

To remind, in Mar 1918 the Azeri party Musavat started Armenian pogroms in Baku. This made the Dashnak government of the Third Armenian Republic together with the Armenian Communists led by Stepan Shahumyan to march into the city and to stop the massacres by force. A Soviet Commune ruled Baku for almost half a year to be later shot down by the British. Naturally this civil war claimed numerous lives but that was not Azeri pogroms. Quite the opposite, the 1918 events were much like the Jan 1990 Baku pogroms when Soviet troops led by Alexander Lebed opened fire to prevent Armenian massacres by the People's Front of Azerbaijan, says Khachatryan.

04/04/04 - Azerbaijan better prepared for Karabakh war than in 1993 - ANS TV

The Azerbaijani army, economy and public are now better prepared for war than they were back in 1993, the commercial Azerbaijani ANS TV has said in a wide-ranging analysis of a possible resumption of military hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway Nagornyy Karabakh Republic. This time, there may also be "less US pressure" on Azerbaijan, the TV

said. It added that the war might damage Azerbaijan's economic development and delay the construction of an oil pipeline to link Baku with the Turkish port of Ceyhan via Tbilisi. (...)

04/05/04 - Experts Call On Opposition For More Active Participation in Municipal (...) - RFE/RL

Elections International institutions continue diligently criticizing serious vote fraud in the last presidential and parliamentary elections, calling on the Azerbaijani government to spare no effort for free and fair elections. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission has now recommended changing the composition of the pro-government Central Election Commission (CEC), dominated by the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP).

As early as before the 15 October presidential vote, both international institutions and the opposition were dissatisfied with the composition of the commission. In fact, the proposed form was chosen temporarily as a compromise version, and the commission was formed hurriedly in the run-up to the elections. At present the CEC gives six seats to the ruling YAP, six seats to opposition parties in parliament, three seats to the pro-government "independent" parties in parliament, and three seats to the opposition not represented in parliament.

According to Eldar Ismailov of the domestic monitoring organization For the Sake of Civil Society, the principles of the formation of the commission do not meet international standards. Human rights activist Murad Sadeddinov recalls that it was not the first time the Venice Commission and the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights make recommendations in this regard. In March 2003, several months before the presidential elections, they voiced similar advice. (...)

04/05/04 - New Azerbaijani foreign Minister appointed - RFE/RL Newsline

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on 2 April appointed a career diplomat as his new foreign minister, AP and Turan reported.

The new foreign minister, Almar Mammadyarov, replaces Vilayat Guliyev, who held the post since 1999. Mammadyarov served with the Azerbaijani Embassy in Washington and as ambassador to Italy. Reaction to the news was mixed, with former Foreign Minister Tofik Zulfugarov saying the move "is undoubtedly a positive fact" that will allow a career diplomat to be able to reorganize and improve the Foreign Ministry. Opposition leader Ali Kerimli of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (AHCP) offered an opposing view, suggesting that the appointment of a relatively unknown person reflects the government's intention to limit the role and influence of the foreign minister. (...)

04/06/04 - Turkey vows to continue military aid and training for Azerbaijani armed forces - RFE/RL Newsline

Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiev met with General Jahangir Akshit of the Turkish armed forces' General Staff on 5 April in Baku, the official Azerbaijani News Agency reported. The Turkish general pledged to continue to provide the Azerbaijani armed forces with logistical and technical assistance and presented Abiev with plans for the military training of Azerbaijani officers in Turkish military academies.

04/08/04 - Actions of protest held under the initiative of the Azerbaijani journalists in Turkey - Azer Tag

As was stated, representatives of independent mass media of Azerbaijan have carried out in the cities of Igdir and Ankara of Turkey, actions of protest to express the concern in connection with probability of opening of borders between Turkey and Armenia. During the meetings and rallies in Igdir, citizens of Turkey also have joined our journalists and have supported them. Governor of Igdir Musa Kiuchukgurd received our journalists. Having reminded words of our national leader, the outstanding politician of the Turkic world Heydar Aliyev "we are one nation, two states!", the Governor has emphasized that the Turkish people constantly supports fair position of the Azerbaijan brothers.

On April 8, at the Gizil Ay Square in Ankara, a populous meeting with participation of the independent journalists who have arrived from Azerbaijan, our citizens living and working in Ankara, students, and representatives of the Turkish public was held. The demonstrators had in their hands national flags of Azerbaijan and Turkey, posters with slogans "NO!" to opening of borders! "The Turkish-Azerbaijan friendship is eternal and indestructible!"; expressed protest against the aggressive policy of Armenia. For carrying out of mass action in Ankara all corresponding official sanctions have been received. During meeting and rally, no infringements of law and public order were admitted

04/09/04 - Ilham Aliev accuses authors of national encyclopedia of wrong orientation - Arminfo

Azeri President Ilham Aliev met Thursday with the council of the national encyclopedia to consider the preliminary version of the Big Encyclopedia particularly one of its volumes concerning Azerbaijan's history.

TURAN reports that Aliev criticized the authors of the encyclopedia for apolitical stance and lack of principle. They did not mention the names of famous public and scientific figures giving meanwhile much space to Armenian activists.

Aliev was upset at seeing "Stepanakert" mentioned in the book. "Don't you know that there is no such city." He was also indignant that the encyclopedia mentions the first secretary of the central committee of the Azeri Communist Party Vezirov but says nothing about his father Haydar Aliev. "This is a political mistake," he said. Aliev was against calling the 70-80s of the last century "a period of stagnation." (...)

04/13/04 - Turkish, Azeri presidents sign declaration on Karabakh - Turan news agency

A meeting of the Azerbaijani and Turkish presidents was held in Ankara today as part of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's official visit to Turkey. After the presidents' 30-minute meeting in private, the talks continued at the level of delegations.

In his statement for the press, Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer said Ankara attached special importance to relations with Baku and intended to maintain the relations on this level. Touching on the Karabakh theme, Sezer said that Turkey believes that the conflict must be resolved peacefully in accordance with the principles of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and international law.
(...)

04/14/04 – Government official deplors publication in Azerbaijan of “satanic verses” - RFE/RL Newsline

Rafik Aliyev, chairman of Azerbaijan's State Committee for Religious Affairs, has described as "a disgrace" the publication in the new newspaper "Sanat" of the first installment of a translation into Azerbaijani of Salman Rushdie's controversial novel "The Satanic Verses," according to the independent daily "Sharg" on 14 April as cited by Turan.

04/14/04 – Azeri MPs to spy on Armenians - Arminfo

Each Azeri must be a secret service agent, Azeri MP Musa Musayev said during the Tuesday parliamentary discussion of a bill on intelligence. He said that the failure of the project of national encyclopedia was due to Armenian special services. Even today there are many "Armenian brides" in Armenia. "All of us must be on the alert."

The bill says that intelligence services must enjoy all-out support from both organizations and civilians.

04/15/04 - Azerbaijan to recognize Turkish Cyprus if UN plan fails - Azeri leader - ANS TV

[Presenter] If Northern Cyprus says yes and the Greek Cypriot side says no during the forthcoming referendum in Cyprus [on a UN plan to reunify Cyprus], Azerbaijan will be one of the first countries to recognize the [Turkish] Republic of Northern Cyprus. This sensational statement was made by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev at a meeting with the local media within the framework of his visit to Turkey. Our special correspondent Qanira

Pasayeva reports from Turkey. Hello, Qanira.
(...)

04/16/04 – Azerbaijan will arm due to Turkey and Israel - Arminfo news

Israel and Turkey are close to conclude a large bargain on sale of arms to Azerbaijan. According to Azerbaijani Mass media, this information was spread by an Israeli web-site "Isra.com" yesterday referring to the agency First Class News. According to diplomatic sources in Ankara, the web-site says that under the agreements, Israel will supply technologies and components, while, weapons will be assembled in Turkey, and then will be delivered to Azerbaijan. Those in Turkey hope for this contact to open a way to new agreements on sale of the Turkish-Israeli arms to the countries of Middle Asia. Earlier such attempts of joint projects in the sphere of weapon trading often resulted in a fact that clients preferred to buy weapons directly from Israel, the web-site reports.
(...)

04/20/04 – Washington profile again confirms Azerbaijan ties with al Qaeda terrorist organization - Arminfo News

In 1993 al Qaeda terrorist organization supported Azerbaijan in war against Armenia for controlling Nagorno Karabakh, reports Panarmenian.net with reference to a special chronology prepared by Washington ProFile on the occasion of the 25-th anniversary of Usama ben Laden launching jihad against foes of the Muslims.

According to the source, in September 1993 some 1.5 thousand Afghan veterans arrived in Azerbaijan. However, due to heavy casualties the Afghan brigade was disbanded. According to the data of the agency, the facts cited were checked many times and were confirmed by US and world investigation organizations.

04/20/04 – Ministers of foreign affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia adopted statement - Azer Tag

A meeting between Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Elmar

Mammadyarov and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Vartan Oskanian took place in Prague, Czech Republic, on April 16. According to the Foreign Ministry's press-center, the Ministers approved a statement for media. The statement says: 'Foreign Minister of Armenia and newly appointed Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan met April 16, 2004 for the first time in Prague. This meeting organized by Minsk Group co-chairs allowed the parties to exchange views on possible ways facilitating the progress. Armenia and Azerbaijan reaffirmed the interest in settling Nagorno-Garabakh conflict and expressed consent to continue this dialogue. Foreign Ministries highly assessed the support of government of Czech Republic and OSCE'.

04/21/04 - Agency reports clashes between ethnic Azeris, Armenians in Iran - Turan news agency

Clashes occurred between activists of the National Revival Movement of Southern Azerbaijan (NRMSA) and local Armenians yesterday evening. The head of the NRMSA office in Baku, Huseyn Turkelli, has told Turan that the reason for the clashes was that the Iranian authorities sanctioned a rally of Armenians outside the Turkish embassy on 24 April. Earlier, the Iranian deputy interior minister (?Ruhanifar) had said that the authorities would prevent the rally. After receiving the authorities' approval, representatives of the Armenian community hung posters on Tehran's central squares Valiasr, Enghelab and (?Ahli Bulvar) inviting to the rally. Movement activists tore off the posters, which provoked the clashes between [Iranian] Azeris and Armenians. Iranian security forces supported Armenians and used force against the movement's activists, some of whom were injured and arrested, including a woman, Sara Abbasi.

04/22/04 – German foreign Minister pressures Azerbaijan over human rights- RFE/RL Newsline

On a one-day visit to Baku on 21 April, Joschka Fischer said the Azerbaijani leadership must put an

end to human rights violations and implement economic reform in order to improve its relations with the EU, dpa reported. During talks with President Ilham Aliyev, Fischer characterized Azerbaijan's economy as the strongest in the South Caucasus and affirmed the shared interest of both Germany and the EU in expanding bilateral economic cooperation, according to Turan. Fischer further expressed the hope that Azerbaijan and Armenia will "take decisive steps" toward resolving the Karabakh conflict, and pledged Germany's assistance as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group in reaching a peace settlement.

04/30/04 - Azeri Muslims Call For Hijab Photos - Islam Online

Hijab is banned in photographs used in Azeri official documents.

The Islamic Party in Azerbaijan appealed to President Ilham Aliyev to allow Muslim women to wear hijab in photographs taken for official documents. "We presented an urgent appeal to the President to that effect, as the female party members see the matter as part of preserving their personal freedom," Erada Goliefa, the party's Women Committee chairman, said Thursday, April 29. The Russian NTV said security officials have refused to issue passports and IDs to women photographed with their head covered, forcing the women and human rights groups to file lawsuits against the government. Goliefa said that the wife of the country's mufti and his daughter only are allowed to get ID photos with hijab. "While the rest of Muslim women are not permitted to do so," she lamented.

The government has recently approved a personal freedom law, which allows any Muslim woman to choose the form of their photographs attached to official documents. Goliefa hoped the move should go further for hijab to appear in these photographs, which dissuaded 2000 Muslim women from casting ballots in the recent 2003 Presidential elections as they have no IDs. Islam deems hijab a religious obligation which has nothing to do with portraying any political affiliation. Goliefa called on the government to leave Muslim women meet this obligation.

05/02/04 - Azerbaijan's military manoeuvre adversely affects Caspian issue, Iranian daily says - Shargh web site

The Republic of Azerbaijan is planning to perform a military manoeuvre in the Caspian Sea in the coming days. Contrary to the remarks by the commander of Azerbaijan's Border Guards regarding the aims of the manoeuvre in terms of evaluating the readiness of the border forces of the Azerbaijan Republic in order to confront a possible violation of its maritime borders, it seems that this military action is commensurate with the deployment of NATO equipment in the areas close to the northern borders of Iran and that the aims of the manoeuvres are something else. Holding military manoeuvres so soon after the recent Moscow conference, during which the littoral states of the Caspian Sea declared their verbal commitment to keep the Caspian Sea far from militarization and help the establishment of a durable peace, is a matter that can be studied from several points of view. A long time ago, Aran and Shirvan were annexed forcefully by Tsarist Russia and the name was changed to the Republic of Azerbaijan. The policies of that republic in the later course of history were always accompanied with the negation of the historical identities and always affected the security of the northern borders of Iran. The leaders of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which has fewer than 8 million population, under the guidance of the late president of the Azerbaijan, Haydar Aliyev, used the old doctrines of the former USSR to insist on the common language of Azeris with Iranian Azerbaijan, as an element for trying to separate this part of Iran from the rest of the country. (...)

05/03/04 - Police target opposition in Azerbaijani exclave - RFE/RL Newsline

Police in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan have intensified their harassment of opposition politicians in the wake of last week's announcement of the creation of a Center for Democratic Development (DIM) comprising the regional organizations of several prominent

opposition parties, Turan reported on 1 May (...). On 28 April, two men abducted and beat up a member of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, and the following day a Nakhichevan police official visited the DIM headquarters in Nakhichevan and warned activists to abandon their activities and stop publicizing negative political developments in the region. Meeting on 1 May, DIM members agreed to stage a mass rally on 28 May, which is the anniversary of the declaration in 1918 of an independent Azerbaijan Republic, Turan reported on 3 May.

05/03/04 - Azerbaijan ambassador protests against Korean company - Azer Tag

Korean Republic 'DAEWOO-UNITEL' in Tashkent and Nagorno-Karabakh 'Karabakh Telecom' have reached a cooperation agreement. In this connection, Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Uzbekistan Aydin Azimov met with 'DAEWOO-UNITEL' Director General Khan Yeng Sangu to inform him in detail on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and described the company's step as inadmissible. (...)

05/04/04 - Azeri defence chief not to attend Armenia-hosted CIS talks -Ekho

Azerbaijani Defence Minister Safar Abiyev will not attend the 21 May 2004 gathering of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) defence ministers in Yerevan, Azerbaijan's daily Ekho quoted the press secretary of the Azerbaijani Defence Ministry, Ramiz Malikov, as saying on 4 May. "Azerbaijan does not knock on the door of its enemy," Malikov said. "It is Armenians who are shamelessly keen on visiting Baku". Malikov said that this will be a regular meeting and Azerbaijan will lose "absolutely nothing" from not attending it. Military expert Uzeyir Cafarov told Ekho that had the gathering been held in any other country of the CIS, then Abiyev would have definitely taken part in it.

05/08/04 - Aliyev Urges Minsk Group Co-chairs to Mediate, Not To Observe Talks - Baku Today

Co-chairmen of the Minsk group of

the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have to display that they are really mediating the talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev told reporters on Friday.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the co-chairs' activities, Aliyev said 'they have to stop just observing the talks.' The Minsk group was set up in March 1992, and its co-chairmen representing the United States, France and Russia have failed in their activities to find a peaceful settlement to the 16-year-old conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. President Aliyev reiterated his government's position that the chances for resolving the conflict by peaceful means have not been exhausted yet. (...)

05/11/04 – Azerbaijani President pardons more than 300 prisoners - RFE/RL Newsline

To mark the birthday of his deceased father and predecessor Heidar Aliyev, President Aliyev signed a decree on 10 May pardoning 363 prisoners, Turan and Interfax reported. Those freed include several human rights activists and individuals considered by the Council of Europe to be political prisoners, among them the former acting head of the Baku Naval College, Djanmirza Mirzoev. Mirzoev was sentenced in November 2001 to eight years' imprisonment on charges, which he denied, of arranging the murder in 1993 of Rear Admiral Eduard Huseinov (...). Mirzoev claimed at his trial he was sentenced in retaliation for his campaign to expose corruption within the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry (...). The online daily zerkalo.az on 11 May quoted Mirzoev as saying he will continue to campaign to have the sentence against him repealed.

05/13/04 - Azerbaijani officer confesses to premeditated murder of Armenian classmate - Associated Press Worldstream

An Azerbaijani officer who hacked to death an Armenian classmate during a NATO course has confessed to the murder and said he planned it as revenge for a 1992 Armenian assault of Azerbaijanis, police said Thursday. Lt. Ramil

Safarov of Azerbaijan on Feb. 19 used an ax to hack Lt. Gurgen Markarian of Armenia to death in a dormitory that was being used by participants of a NATO Partnership for Peace English language course in Budapest. At the time, police said the murder had been committed with "unusual cruelty" and that Safarov had tried, unsuccessfully, to enter the room of another Armenian with the intention of killing him. A police statement released Thursday said Safarov had confessed to committing the murder and claimed that the long-standing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia was at the root of his act. "There was no concrete grievance between the killer and the victim before the (murder)," the Budapest police said. Safarov initially had planned to kill an Armenian on Feb. 26 - the anniversary of a 1992 Armenian assault which killed dozens of Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan - even before coming to Hungary for the NATO course, police said. He told police he later decided to commit the crime ahead of the anniversary date because "the presence of the Armenians was getting on my nerves." Police investigators have recommended that the Budapest Attorney General's office charge Safarov with premeditated murder carried out with unusual cruelty and with vile motives and aims. The NATO program attended by the two men is aimed at increasing cooperation between neutral and former Soviet bloc nations and NATO in peacekeeping and other areas. Relations between the two former Soviet Republics remain tense after Armenian-backed forces drove Azerbaijan's army out of the ethnic Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s. Despite a 1994 cease-fire ending the war that killed 30,000 people and left about 1 million homeless, no agreement has been reached on the territory's final status.

05/25/04 – Azeri state broadcast chief threatens to suspend BBC from national radio - Trend news agency

The broadcasts of the world-famous BBC on the Azerbaijani state radio channel (national first programme) may be suspended, the chairman of the Azerbaijani state television and

radio company, Nizami Xudiyev, told the Milli Maclis today, Trend reports. He said the company had sent an official warning to the BBC. The message condemns a BBC reporter's recent visit to Nagornyy Karabakh and the preparation of a series of reports from there without notifying Baku officials. The document describes this as unacceptable and against Azerbaijani legislation. (...)

05/26/04 – Azerbaijan rejects criticism of human-rights record - RFE/RL Newsline

Presidential administration official Ali Hasanov told Interfax on 25 May that he considers unfair the criticism of Azerbaijan's human-rights record contained in a Freedom House report released the previous day (see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/natransit.htm>). That report noted a deterioration over the past 12 months in the electoral process; the development of civil society; independence of the media; and the constitutional, legislative, and judicial framework. While admitting that the situation in Azerbaijan cannot be compared to Western democracies, Hasanov claimed that over the past decade Azerbaijan has made progress in ensuring media freedom and freedom of political activity in developing a civil society.

05/26/04 – Empowers local courts to suspend political parties - RFE/RL Newsline

Also on 25 May, Azerbaijan's parliament approved amendments to the Law on Political Parties, zerkalo.az reported the following day. Those amendments empower local courts to suspend the registration of political parties; previously only the Constitutional Court was empowered to do so.

05/28/04 – (...) EU official stresses need for democracy in Azerbaijan - RFE/RL Newsline

Speaking at a press conference in Baku on 27 May, Anthonius W. de Vries, who is the European Commission's special envoy in Azerbaijan, said he has taken note of the fact that no public rallies have been permitted in that country for almost eight months, Turan reported. He said the establishment

of democracy is one of the primary requirements resulting from Azerbaijan's inclusion in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy. He added that his mandate entails meeting with opposition and human rights activists and NGOs.

05/28/04 - Azeri minister blames international bodies for Armenian defectors' hunger strike - Sarq

Text of unattributed report by Azerbaijani newspaper Sarq on 28 May headlined "The national security minister calls on the two Armenians to stop their hunger strike" and subheaded "Namiq Abbasov: 'If any tragedy happens to them, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other structures will be responsible for this'" Azerbaijani National Security Minister Namiq Abbasov has called on the Armenian defectors, Artur Apresyan and Roman Teryan, to stop their hunger strike, which they have started in protest against the activities of the UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross. He said that the aforesaid individuals place the responsibility for this action on international organizations. Abbasov added that according to the law, those held in solitary confinement cells at the National Security Ministry are forced if they announce a hunger strike. "But the law does not apply to them Apresyan and Teryan," Abbasov said. He added: "Today I issued an instruction to persuade them to stop their move. Let them be patient, start to eat and see what extra measures we take. Our human rights organizations, NGOs and media outlets are protecting them. If any tragedy happens to them, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other structures will be responsible for this".

***NAGORNO KARABAKH /
HAUT KARABAGH***

02/27/04 - Azeri commando group attempts crossing NKR army defence line - ARKA News Agency

Azeri commando group attempted crossing the first defence line of NKR army on a territory controlled

by NKR, in the eastern sector of the NKR and Azerbaijan contact line near settlement Bash Karvend. As ARKA News Agency was told in the NKR Defence Ministry Press Service, units of the NKR army being on military duty, succeeding in neutralisation of the Azeri commando group. As a result of intensified exchange of fire, one member of the commando group was killed, while several wounded. While retreating, the members of the group took with them the wounded, leaving the dead near Karabakh line. The NKR side did not suffer casualties during the incident.

The incident was reported to OSCE and the Red Cross Society offices accredited in NKR. The State Commission of the NKR for POWs and Hostages Issues leads negotiations with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Committee in regard of handing over the body of the dead Azeri commando group member to Azerbaijani side.

The NKR Foreign Ministry Press Service reminds once more about danger of intensifying of tension in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and warns the Azerbaijani side that any hostile actions in the contact zone will be suppressed resolutely.

03/01/04 - NKR President signs decree on dismissal of government Deputy chairmen - ARKA News Agency

NKR President Arkady Gukasian signed decree on dismissal of Government deputy chairmen Benki Bakhshiyani and Yuri Gazarian. NKR President's press office told ARKA that the decree was signed with the goal of optimization of NKR Government structure.

03/01/04 - Actions of Azeri party determined with anti-Armenian propaganda - ARKA News Agency

Actions of Azeri party determined with anti-Armenian propaganda, conducted by Azeri administration, the President of NKR Arkady Gukasian stated today commenting another attempt of Azeri commando to intersect Karabakh Army defence line. "Talking about barbarism, we don't mean people, we talk about authorities that indulge crimes. It is necessary to give corresponding

estimation of criminal activity of Azeri authorities", Gukasian said. Note, few days ago Azeri commando group attempted crossing the first defence line of NKR army on a territory controlled by NKR, in the eastern sector of the NKR and Azerbaijan contact line near settlement Bash Karvend. As ARKA News Agency was told in the NKR Defence Ministry Press Service, units of the NKR army being on military duty, succeeding in neutralisation of the Azeri commando group. As a result of intensified exchange of fire, one member of the commando group was killed, while several wounded. While retreating, the members of the group took with them the wounded, leaving the dead near Karabakh line.

The NKR side did not suffer casualties during the incident.

03/01/04 - Sumgait becomes the first proof of impossibility of Nagorno-Karabakh's existence in the composition of Azerbaijan - ARKA News Agency

The events in Sumgait became the first proof that Nagorno-Karabakh cannot exist in the composition of Azerbaijan, according to Arkadi Ghukasyan, the President of NKR. Speaking about the necessity of resumption of the negotiations, the President noted that Nagorno-Karabakh declared about its readiness to begin the dialog for many times, but for working out the proper mechanisms of future relations it is necessary to give a proper estimate to the past.

On February 27, 1988 massacre of Armenians began in Sumgait, Azerbaijani town. Scores of Armenians were killed within 3 days. The precise number of the victims is not known up to date. The official courses stated about 32 Armenians murdered. Sumgait events were a reply to the decision of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous region as of February 20, 1988 to separate from Azerbaijan.

03/01/04 - Karabakh leader further restructures government - Mediamax news agency

The agriculture minister of the Nagorny-Karabakh Republic (NKR), Benik Bakhshiyani, and the minister of town-planning and development of production

infrastructures, Yuriy Kazaryan, have been dismissed from the posts of the NKR government's deputy prime ministers.

The corresponding decree was signed by president Arkadiy Gukasyan with the aim to optimize the NKR government's structures, the presidential press service told Mediamax today. Moreover, the press service noted, the president found expedient to combine the posts of minister and deputy prime minister.

03/01/04 – Karabakh not to be part of Azerbaijan, leader says - Arminfo

"Sumgait proves that it is impossible for Nagorny Karabakh to be part of Azerbaijan," the president of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic (NKR), Arkadiy Gukasyan, told journalists yesterday (29 February).

Arkadiy Gukasyan called for negotiations with the Azerbaijani side and stressed that Nagorny Karabakh had repeatedly announced its readiness for dialogue and for an assessment of the past to work out a mechanism for building relations in the future.

03/16/04 - OSCE chairman sees dialogue as only way of solving Karabakh crisis - ANS Radio

Solomon Passi, chairman-in-office of the OSCE, who is on a two-day official visit to Azerbaijan, thinks that there is only one way of solving the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

The problem can be resolved only through dialogue. That must be the first step. We can take other steps after the first one, end of quote.

As for his visit to the region, the OSCE chairman-in-office, who arrived in Azerbaijan from Georgia, said that he would leave for Armenia from Azerbaijan and added he was not planning to visit Karabakh.

Before his appointment as chairman-in-office, Passi stated that the OSCE would concentrate its activities on the resolution of regional conflicts in the Caucasus.

03/16/04 – Karabagh officials reiterate the need for a new negotiation format - ArmenPress

Nagorno Karabagh parliament chairman Oleg Yesayan and foreign affairs minister Ashot Ghulian met today with Ursula Schleikher, head of a European Union's delegation that has arrived in Armenia to attend the 6-sixth session of EU-Armenia parliamentary commission. The meeting was held at Karabagh representation in Yerevan and was focused mainly on ways of resolving the ongoing conflict.

Speaking to journalists after the meeting, Ghulian said Karabagh speaker has once again repeated that the conflict could be resolved only with participation of its representatives in the talks, as "its population's security and future are on stake," but added that Karabagh's desire to reshape the format of negotiations is not sufficient. "Azerbaijan is trying now to complicate the negotiation process and it is hard to mention a concrete date when Karabagh may be involved in them," he said.

According to Ghulian, Europe's willingness to assume a bigger role in the regulation of the conflict is the evidence of its growing interest in the region, confirmed also by appointing a Special Representative of the EU for the South Caucasus, "but so far the EU-South Caucasus partnership has not gone beyond the boundaries of economic and humanitarian aid."

Admitting that the talks are in a deadlock, Karabagh foreign minister said there are indications of new upcoming contacts between Armenian and Azeri officials and only after these meetings one can say if there is a progress.

03/17/04 - Karabakh to be full party to talks - separatist leader - Mediamax news agency

The Nagorny Karabakh Republic (NKR) will be involved in the negotiations to resolve the Karabakh conflict as a full party, the Nagorny Karabakh president, Arkadiy Gukasyan, told the OSCE chairman-in-office, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passi, in Yerevan today.

Gukasyan said the fact that the NKR is not involved in the talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan was temporary.

Commenting on the forthcoming meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in Prague, Gukasyan said "this format cannot facilitate the Karabakh settlement".

"All contacts are important but the problem can hardly be resolved without Karabakh," the NKR president said.

03/19/04 - Three civilians killed in latest mine explosion in Nagorno-Karabakh - Associated Press Worldstream

A jeep of hunters driving in the contested Nagorno-Karabakh enclave hit an anti-tank mine that killed three civilians and wounded another six, a demining organization said Friday.

The explosion happened Sunday evening, the office of London-based HALO trust in Nagorno-Karabakh's regional capital Stepanakert said.

Nagorno-Karabakh remains laced with mines from the war that left ethnic Armenian forces in control of the enclave within Azerbaijan. A cease-fire between the two former Soviet republics was signed in 1994, but the enclave's political status is unresolved and Armenian and Azeri forces face off across a demilitarized zone.

Including the latest explosion, HALO said seven civilians have died in Nagorno-Karabakh this year. Nine people died in 2003.

03/30/04 – NKR foreign Minister receives head of international program for mine clearing and neutralization of unexploded ammunition - ARKA News Agency

Ashot Ghulyan, NKR Foreign Minister received Mathew Howell, the Head of International Program for Mine Clearing and Neutralization of Unexploded Ammunition in NKR. As NKR Foreign Ministry Press Service told ARKA today, Matthew Howell, whose authorities in NKR expired presented to NKR Foreign Minister the new head of the program Ed Row. As mentioned by the Minister, the problem of mine clearing is still actual for NKR even after 10 years of the ceasefire in the conflict zone. He stressed that NKR authorities are interested in continuation of the Program activity on mine clearing of NKR territory,

that according to the Minister is very important for security of the population and economic development of the NKR. As reported by Howell the implementation of the program will be continued for other several years, but the term of mine clearing will be reduced within limits of possibility.

04/20/04 – US mediator, Minister of NKR discuss talks format - Mediamax news agency

The foreign minister of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic (NKR), Ashot Gulyan, has told the US co-chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group, Steven Mann, about the need for the direct participation of Nagorny Karabakh in the talks. The meeting between Gulyan and Mann took place in the evening of 19 April at the permanent mission of the NKR in Yerevan. At Mann's request Gulyan spoke about the NKR's position on settling the conflict and about the economic and domestic political situation in the NKR.

Mann confirmed the firm intention of the USA to continue to seek the resolution of the Karabakh conflict through the OSCE Minsk Group. He said he will visit Nagorny Karabakh during his next visit to the region.

04/21/04 – Representatives of Russian and US embassies in Azerbaijan refuse to march to Karabakh - Arminfo

Representatives of Russian and US embassies in Azerbaijan have refused to take part in the May 8 march to Karabakh, reports Zerkalo newspaper (Baku). They say that this would be a mistake to take part in such an action while the OSCE MG mediated Karabakh conflict settlement talks are underway. To remind, the march is planned by the Organization for Liberation of Karabakh. The itinerary will be announced by the end of this week. The number of the participants is being specified. The organization leader Akif Nagi says that it may total some 150 people among them veterans of the Karabakh war, refugees and intellectuals. The objective is to draw the world's attention to the Karabakh problem and Armenia's occupant policy.

04/21/04 – NKR Deputy FM Warns Foreign Agencies Against "Inadequate" Reports – Mediamax news agency

The deputy foreign minister of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic [NKR], Masis Mailyan, has expressed satisfaction with the fact that the recently-published 2003 international narcotics strategy report by the US Department of State does not any longer contain information promoted by Azerbaijan concerning the cultivation and spread of narcotics in Nagorny Karabakh and its subject territories. In an interview with Mediamax, Mailyan said that this became possible due to the openness of the Karabakh authorities that have repeatedly addressed appropriate international structures, particularly the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as well as the US Department of State with an appeal to set up an independent monitoring group which will be sent to Nagorny Karabakh to study the situation on the ground and establish objective facts. Mailyan recalled that "in order to hamper the sending of such an international mission to Nagorny Karabakh the Azerbaijani side has been putting forward unacceptable conditions during several years, thus misleading the international community".

The NKR deputy foreign minister expressed the hope that from now on the US Department of State as well as international structures will refuse using inadequate information in their reports. "We are sure that the activities of the group of independent experts will allow to put an end to the farfetched accusations on the part of Azerbaijan and will prevent further misinformation of the international community," Mailyan said.

04/23/04 – OSCE MG new U.S co-chairman satisfied with results of negotiations for Karabakh conflict settlement in Prague - Arminfo

American co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Steven Mann expressed satisfaction with the results of the negotiations for settlement of the Karabakh conflict in Prague, Yerevan and Baku speaking at a briefing in Baku,

INTERFAX-AZERBAIJAN reports. He called the negotiations fruitful, adding that the Minsk Group supports the dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan at all the levels. He called the dialogue an important element for the problem's resolution, pointing out that the problem cannot be solved through one meeting only. He said that the date of the next visit of the co-chairs to the region has not been determined yet. As regards the possibility of compromises in the conflict's settlement, Steven Mann said that they are not at the very stage to discuss the elements of the problem's resolution. (...)

04/25/04 – Chechens to support Azeris in case of Karabakh war, rights activist says - Yeni Musavat

Text of R. Kazimli report by Azerbaijani newspaper Yeni Musavat on 25 April headlined "Any method can be used to liberate Karabakh" and subheaded "Mayrbek Taramov reckons that any action taken against an aggressor does not run counter to international norms" We have reported that 22 Azerbaijanis were arrested (in August 2003) for wishing to fight on the side of Chechens. Those people were led by Rovsan Badalov and wanted to wage a guerrilla warfare in Karabakh. One may wonder as to why they were arrested. Azerbaijan's lands have long been occupied by the Armenians and the authorities always talk a lot about liberating them. Perhaps guerrilla warfare is now considered illegal by international law? We decided to go to Chechens who are fighting a bloody war for their rights with this question. The director of the Chechen Rights Centre and independent journalist, Mayrbek Taramov, said that the entire world has come to accept that the war in Chechnya as the national liberation movement of the Chechens. "All the events unfolding in Chechnya, the assassination of (former Chechen president) Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Russia's persecution of Chechens shows that Russia resorts to terrorist methods. Therefore, the entire world has to help Chechnya. As for the imprisonment of the Azerbaijanis, there is no evidence to support their arrest. It is said that they wanted to fight for the

Chechens. At the time one judge told me, avoiding eye contact, that he understood everything but could not do otherwise. We have to admit that a person cannot be convicted of plans to do something. Regrettably, this kind of thing is possible only in Azerbaijan."

Taramov recalled that Chechen leaders, for instance Shamil Basayev, used to say that they were ready to assist Azerbaijan in re-taking Karabakh. The Chechens are ready to keep their word, Taramov said. "The Chechens have once proven that and they are ready to help the Azerbaijani people for a second or third time. The Chechen mohajedin consider this their holy duty."

(...)

04/28/04 - Authorities in Karabagh say May 8 march aims to stir up provocations - ArmenPress

Authorities in Nagorno Karabagh responded on Tuesday to purported plans of so-called Azerbaijani organization Karabagh Liberation Organization (KLO) to march to Karabagh on May 8, the date of the "occupation" of the second-largest town of Shushi by Armenian troops. A statement issued by Karabagh foreign ministry says the march, portrayed in Azerbaijan as a public initiative, is a propaganda and populist idea, designed by top authorities of that country. The statement says this initiative could have been assessed as a move aimed at building the climate of confidence should not it have been plotted by KLO leader Akif Naghi, who has won a notoriety by his anti-Armenian and racist announcements. The statement also says there is no doubt that the "peaceful march" has been designed to instigate provocations on the line of contact between Azeri and Armenian troops.

(...)

04/29/04 - Aliyev calls for gradual settlement of conflict with Armenia - ITAR-TASS News Agency

Azerbaijani President Ilkham Aliyev favoured the settlement of the conflict with Armenia on a gradual basis.

The first step is "to withdraw Armenian troops from the seven

districts of Azerbaijan" that are not part of Nagorno-Karabakh, Aliyev said.

Speaking at the PACE spring session on Thursday, the Azerbaijani president said this initiative has become an important step towards strengthening trust. This idea has been discussed by Europarliament and other European structures and supported by them, he added.

"It is inadmissible when one of the Council of Europe countries is occupying part of another country, which is also a CE member. Armenia will win nothing neither in an economic nor moral aspect. This only can infringe upon Armenia's prestige at the international arena. I believe that Armenian leaders are beginning to understand this," the Azerbaijani leader stressed.

At the same time, Aliyev pointed out that Azerbaijan will never agree to develop economic cooperation with Armenia till Armenian troops are not withdrawn from these districts. "Azerbaijan cannot cooperate with a country that occupies part of its territories," Aliyev emphasised.

04/29/04 - Azeri President notes positive changes in OSCE Minsk group work - ITAR-TASS

Azerbaijani president Ilkham Aliyev has noted positive changes in the activities of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on Nagorno Karabakh.

Aliyev told journalists on Wednesday, "the activity of the Minsk Group has become noticeable, its co-chairmen are persistently seeking solution to the problem."

The Azerbaijani president believes the settlement process is underway although not very actively(...)

05/13/04 - Armenian, Azerbaijani foreign Ministers meet - RFE/RL

Vartan Oskanian and Elmar Mammadyarov began talks on the evening of 12 May in Strasbourg on approaches to resolving the Karabakh conflict, Turan reported the following day. Prior to the talks, Oskanian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that there is no set agenda, and that he does not know which specific issues the Azerbaijani side will raise. Mammadyarov told AFP on 30 April that he and Oskanian

would discuss the possible withdrawal of Armenian forces from seven districts of Azerbaijan in exchange for a resumption of rail traffic between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But Oskanian told RFE/RL on 12 May that proposal is "absurd" and that "there is no point" in discussing it. Also on 12 May, the NKR Foreign Ministry called on the leadership of both Armenia and Azerbaijan "to reaffirm their adherence to maintaining the ceasefire" agreement signed on 12 May 1994 until such time as a formal peace agreement is reached, according to Mediamax on 12 May as cited by Groong.

05/13/04 - OSCE welcomes contacts between Armenian authorities, opposition - Mediamax news agency

Vladimir Pryakhin, the head of the OSCE office in Yerevan and ambassador, has welcomed the resumption of contacts between the authorities and the opposition in Armenia.

"I call on both sides to engage in a genuine dialogue to settle the existing differences within the constitutional framework," Pryakhin said. He said that "a dialogue is the best way to reach mutual understanding and develop political stability", Mediamax news agency reports.

Pryakhin also called on the Armenian authorities to re-consider the cases of people detained during the recent demonstrations and to continue efforts to reform the Code of Administrative Violations. This would make it possible to eliminate the practice of administrative detentions, "which is incompatible with European standards", he said.

05/18/04 - Armenia wants to continue negotiations with Azerbaijan - Interfax

Armenia thinks it necessary to continue Nagorno-Karabakh settlement negotiations with Azerbaijan, its Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian told a press conference in Yerevan on Monday.

"We believe in the efficiency of negotiations, including meetings between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents. We think it is still possible to find common approaches to the Nagorno-

Karabakh settlement," the minister said.

"It is not yet clear for Armenia whether Azerbaijani is ready to provide for the succession of the negotiations and confirm the commitments approved by the late president Heydar Aliyev," Oskanian said.

The Azerbaijani initiative on opening transport routes in exchange for the return of Azerbaijani lands currently under Karabakh control is unacceptable for Armenia, the minister said.

05/27/04 - Armenia sees no need for EU mediation in Karabakh settlement - Interfax

Armenia does not think it is necessary for the European Union to act as mediator in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian told reporters on Wednesday.

He said talks on Nagorno-Karabakh are being held in the framework of the OSCE Minsk group which fully suits the Armenian side.

"The European Union has always promoted the efforts of the Minsk Group and I hope it will continue to do so. But there is currently no need to involve the EU in the negotiations as a mediator," he said.

Oskanian also denied reports of new proposals on Karabakh from Minsk group co-chairmen. "New ideas should not be confused with new proposals," he said.

GEORGIA / GEORGIE

03/01/04 - Georgia to Attack Adzharia with Tanks, Warns Republican President - New York Jewish Times

The Georgian top is planning to crash Adzharia with the force of arms, republican President Aslan Abashidze announced today while addressing ethnic Armenian activists.

"The center wants to rush into Adzharia in tanks. They are preparing tanks, APCs and special forces to break in here. You all know what such things finish with. We saw it in Abkhazia and South Ossetia [self-proclaimed republics in Georgia]. There was merciless

shooting there. Now, they want to re-enact it all here. Khaindrava, [Georgian] Emergencies Minister, is saying, 'We'll enter Adzharia by force,'" said President Abashidze. (...)

03/03/04 - CE criticizes Georgian authorities, warn of democracy decline - AZG Armenian Daily

First time after the 'rose revolution' in Georgia have the international organization condemned the country's leadership on last days of February.

The delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) that visited the country on a three-day visit, had to remind the new administration that the 'velvet revolution' is over and its time to put the duties into practice. Head of the PACE delegation Mathias Yorshi stressed that the Georgian authorities do not meet the commitments assumed towards the CE. Particularly the European diplomat stressed the promise of Saakashvili to reduce the percent of votes a party should collect during elections from 7 to 4 or 5 to win seats in the parliament. Yorshi told a news meeting in Tbilisi that the new authorities don't even show signs that they want to meet the commitments vowed to Europe, and there is a threat that the new parliament will be represented with only one- the ruling party. 'A one-party parliament is not a parliament',- said Yorshi, adding that this will mean decline of democracy in the country.

Also the diplomat stressed the issue of the personnel balance of the Georgian Central Electoral Commission, the CE having suggested 10 people out of the 15 members of the commission to be from opposition parties. Saakashvili was against this balance.

While European delegation was in Tbilisi, Saakashvili was meeting George Bush in Washington. Responding to the statements of the European envoy, Saakashvili said that the decrease of the figure of vote barrier to pass to parliament would boost corruption.

03/09/04 - President denies Georgia abets "terrorists" - RFE/RL Newline

Speaking in Paris where he arrived on 8 March for a working visit,

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili rejected as unfounded acting Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov's allegations that the Georgian authorities have done nothing to prevent "terrorists" infiltrating Chechnya from Georgian territory, Caucasus Press and ITAR-TASS reported. Ivanov said in Paris on 5 March that the Russian military has apprehended "dozens of foreign terrorists" in Chechnya, all of whom had Georgian visas in their passports. Saakashvili pointed out that he proposed to Russian President Vladimir Putin during his recent trip to Moscow that the two countries initiate joint patrols of their shared border to minimize the possibility of illicit border crossings. He said Putin agreed to that proposal but has taken no steps to implement it.

03/12/04 - Armenia can help Georgia's relations with Russia - RIA Novosti

Georgia is trying to improve its relations with Russia today, and Armenia can promote this process because it has close and friendly relations with Russia, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said in an interview with the Second Channel of the Armenian television and the Azg newspaper before his departure for Armenia.

"We have long-standing ties and a common historical background with Armenia. Besides, Armenia is the most acknowledged country of the region. Armenia has maintained friendship with the West and Russia for many years. All this should serve the interests of the entire region," the Georgian president said.

At the same time, Mr. Saakashvili stressed that Georgia was ready to take an active part in the establishment of effective relations between Armenia and Turkey.

In his opinion, Turkey is well aware that relations with Armenia should be developed for the sake of peace in the region.

"I think not only Armenia can promote relations between Georgia and Russia, but Georgia as well can assist Armenian-Turkish ties," said Mr. Saakashvili.

03/18/04 – Turkish-Georgian military exercises to foster border protection - AZG Armenian Daily

Joint military exercises have kicked off March 17 at Turkish-Georgian frontier Akhaltskha and Ardahan frontier territories with participation of both countries' infantry forces. Georgian troops are represented in face of border guard battalions.

'The exercises are aimed at raising the awareness and efficiency of fighting smuggling, organized crime and illegal migration cases',- reports the Georgian border guard department. According to the department's press office, the military exercises have no connection with the events in Adjara.

03/18/04 – Georgian security Council official solicits support in Moscow - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian National Security Council Secretary Vano Merabishvili flew to Moscow on 17 March for talks with his Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov and with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and Foreign Minister Lavrov, Caucasus Press reported. Lavrov stressed Moscow's respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and urged that the tensions between Tbilisi and Batumi be resolved through peaceful constructive dialogue, ITAR-TASS reported. Merabishvili told journalists after those meetings that Moscow will support Saakashvili, whom it regards as a partner in the struggle against separatism, terrorism, and drug trafficking.

03/22/04 – Georgian ruling alliance pledges to abolish parliamentary immunity - RFE/RL Newsline

At a ceremony in Tbilisi on 20 March, the 180 parliamentary candidates from the National Movement and Burdjanadze-Democrats signed a document pledging to work in the legislature that will be elected on 28 March for the abolition of deputies' immunity from prosecution, Georgian media reported. President Saakashvili alleged that "there are persons in the current parliament who are involved in murders and kidnapping, not to mention the misappropriation

of millions of laris." Parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze reasoned that "people who plan to make laws don't need immunity," Caucasus Press reported.

03/24/04 – Weapons cache uncovered near Georgian-Russian border - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze announced that his forces uncovered a weapons cache on 23 March near the Georgian border with Russia, ITAR-TASS and Civil Georgia reported. The weapons cache contained 40 surface-to-air missiles, 20 makeshift missile launchers, and assorted small arms. The Interior Minister added that the weapons are believed to belong to Chechen fighters who reportedly hid them in Georgia "several years ago."

03/26/04 – Georgian President says he does not need opposition representation in parliament - RFE/RL Newsline

Mikheil Saakashvili told a press conference in Tbilisi late on 24 March that there is no need for an opposition presence in the parliament whose remaining 150 members are to be elected on 28 March, according to Caucasus Press and a 25 March press release circulated by the opposition New Rightists. The latter quoted Saakashvili as saying that he does not need people in parliament who would "stab him in the back" by opposing his planned reforms. Saakashvili said he wished the Supreme Court had annulled the outcome of the 2 November parliamentary election in the 75 single-mandate constituencies, where several supporters of now former President Eduard Shevardnadze won parliamentary representation, as did deputies from several opposition parties. Saakashvili told a briefing on 25 March that he would not object if parties that support his initiative to strip parliament deputies of immunity surmount the 7 percent barrier for parliamentary representation in the 28 March vote, the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported. The only opposition party that supported that initiative is Ertoba, which is headed by former Georgian Communist

Party First Secretary Djumber Patiashvili, and which, according to opinion polls, might not receive the required minimum 7 percent of the vote.

03/28/04 - Georgia elects deputies to national parliament - ITAR-TASS News Agency

Georgia started general elections on Sunday at 08.00 local time. The voting will be held till 20.00 at 2,841 polling stations, out of which 265 are located in the Adzharia Autonomous Republic. Another 26 polls operate abroad, including four in Russia (three in Moscow and one in St. Petersburg).

Voters are to elect 150 deputies according to proportional party lists. The above seats are contested by 11 political parties and five blocs. The elections will be pronounced valid if a third of voters go to the polls. (...)

03/29/04 – OSCE mission conclusion on the parliamentary elections in Georgia - A1 Plus

The 28 March parliamentary elections in Georgia demonstrated commendable progress in relation to previous elections, concludes the International Election Observation Mission in a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions issued today.

The Georgian authorities have seized the opportunity in the last few months to bring Georgia's election process into closer alignment with European standards for democratic elections, the Mission has found. However, continued intimidation and physical abuse against opposition supporters and journalists in Ajara, cast a shadow over the overall progress in the election process, its statement adds.

It also makes clear that Georgia's election process will only be fully tested in a more competitive environment, once a genuine level of political pluralism is re-established.

03/29/04 – Right-wing opposition, labor party claim voting rigged, exit polls inaccurate - RFE/RL Newsline

Both the right-wing alliance New Rightists-Industrialists and the

Labor Party challenged the accuracy of pro-government exit polls that suggested that only the National Movement-Democrats surmounted the 7 percent threshold in the 28 March parliamentary ballot, Georgian media reported. In a statement released early on 29 March, New Rightists leader David Gamkrelidze said that data provided by the alliance's representatives at polling stations indicated that it won between 9 percent-10 percent of the vote. Gamkrelidze also noted more than 500 reports of irregularities during the vote count. A group of Labor Party supporters congregated outside the Central Election Commission headquarters during the night of 28-29 March to protest exit polls that showed the party polled only 4.4 percent, Georgian media reported. They claimed Labor won some 32 percent of the vote.

04/06/04 - EU to give Eur10 million urgent aid to Georgia - ITAR-TASS News Agency

European Commission President Romano Prodi said on Tuesday that the European Union would give financial aid to Georgia.

He said the European Commission would assign Eur10 million urgent economic assistance to Georgia and give Eur3.6 million for further reforms in the Georgian justice system. Prodi made the statement at a Tuesday briefing following the meeting with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili.

Prodi said they are also considering the assignment of Eur30 million for other socio-economic reforms in Georgia. (...)

04/19/04 - Final Georgian election results announced - RFE/RL Newsline

Central Election Commission (CEC) spokesman Dimitri Kitoshvili announced at a press conference in Tbilisi on 18 April the final results of the 28 March elections for deputies elected to parliament under the party-list system. Caucasus Press reported on 19 April. He said only two parties received the minimum 7 percent of the vote needed to win parliamentary representation; the National Movement-Democrats polled 66.24 percent of the vote and will have 135 of the 150 party lists seats, and the Industrialists-New Rightists, who polled 7.56 percent,

won the remaining 15 seats, giving the two parties a total of 152 and 23 seats, respectively. Kitoshvili said the Labor Party garnered 6.1 percent; the Tavisupleba bloc headed by Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, son of deceased President Zviad Gamsakhurdia 4.39 percent; and the Union for Democratic Revival (DAK) headed by Adjar Supreme Council Chairman Abashidze 3.86 percent. Voter turnout was estimated at 1.89 million, which is approximately 82 percent of the 2.34 million registered voters. The DAK and the Labor party, which respectively have six and three deputies elected in single-mandate constituencies, rejected the final returns as falsified and said they will appeal them, ITAR-TASS reported. The six DAK deputies said they will boycott parliament sessions, Caucasus Press reported on 19 April.

04/22/04 - Azerbaijani minority in Georgia protests repression - RFE/RL Newsline

The online daily zerkalo.az published on 22 April extracts from a letter received the previous day from representatives of Georgia's 500,000-strong Azerbaijani minority detailing systematic reprisals by the new Georgian leadership. The six signatories, three of them journalists, solicited support to halt reprisals against the staff of the Azerbaijani-language newspaper "Yeni dusunje" and to prevent the anticipated closure of Milli Heyrat, an unofficial organization that defends the interests of the Azerbaijani community, and reprisals against its leaders, who include former Georgian parliament Deputy Zumrud Gurbanli. They further protest systematic repression by local Georgian officials that, they claim, resulted in clashes on 18 April in an (...)

04/22/04 - Georgia hopes for "civilized withdrawal" of Russian military bases - RIA Novosti

The Georgian government hopes that a compromise will eventually be reached in its negotiations with Russia on the withdrawal of military bases, Ambassador of Georgia Konstantin Kemularia told a Moscow press conference Thursday.

There are two Russian military bases in Georgia now: in Akhalkalaki (near the border with Turkey and Armenia) and outside Batumi, the capital of the Adzharian autonomy. Moscow argues that pulling these two bases out in a "civilized manner" will take at least ten years. (...)

05/06/04 - Georgia denies existence of Adzharian scenario for Abkhazia - ITAR-TASS

Speaking at a news conference at the Itar-Tass agency, Zurabishvili expressed doubts that "somebody in Abkhazia was planning to blow up bridges."

The approach to the so-called "frozen conflicts" -- both in Abkhazia and Nagorny Karabakh -- is important within the context of the Abkhazian issue, she said.

There is an understanding in Georgia that frozen conflicts impede the development of democracy," the foreign minister said.

It is up to all Caucasian peoples to decide whether their region will lag behind or become a place in the world where everybody would like to live, Zurabishvili underlined.

05/06/04 - Georgian president announces "new era" - RFE/RL Newsline

Saakashvili, who imposed presidential rule in Adjara on 5 May as thousands of people took to the streets to demand Abashidze's resignation, flew to Batumi early on 6 May, Georgian media reported. Speaking on local television, he told a jubilant population that "a new era" in Georgia's history has begun. Saakashvili has deployed Interior Ministry forces to Adjara to maintain order, prevent looting, and conduct de-mining operations, rustavi2.com reported on 6 May. On 5 May, Georgian Defense Minister Gela Bezhuashvili said Abashidze had ordered the mining of the port and oil terminal in Batumi and other unspecified locations. Speaking on Georgian television on 5 May before Abashidze resigned, Saakashvili said he will name an interim council that will govern Adjara until new elections can be held, RFE/RL's Georgian Service reported. Caucasus Press on 6 May quoted Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, whom Saakashvili named to head that commission, as saying that the

elections will take place within 30 days. Plamen Nikolov, who is the special representative in Tbilisi of Council of Europe Secretary General Walter Schwimmer, called on the Georgian leadership on 6 May to set about drafting a document on the distribution of competencies between the central government and Adjara, Caucasus Press reported.

05/10/04 – Georgia to deploy troops in ethnic Armenian district following clashes - Prime-News

A 150-strong unit of the Internal Troops numbering will be deployed in Tsalka District on Monday (10 May) following mass disturbances involving the district's ethnic Armenian and Georgian residents on Sunday.

Prime-News correspondent has reported from Tsalka that the president's representative in Kvemo Kartli Region, Ioseb Mazmishvili, as well as a group of investigators from the regional offices of the Interior Ministry and the Prosecutor-General's Office, arrived in Tsalka on Monday to investigate the incident.

The Prime-News correspondent has said that the regional administration will be based in Tsalka until the final settlement of the situation in the district. A temporary command post coordinating law enforcers' activities will be set up.

Ioseb Mazmishvili told Prime-News that the temporary command post will work out a plan of special measures, including the disarming of residents.

Disturbances involving ethnic Georgians and Armenians started during a football match on Sunday and later transformed into mass clashes. (...)

05/11/04 – Georgia criticizes Council of Europe - RFE/RL Newline

Speaking in Batumi on 9 May, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili criticized as inappropriate the wording of an appeal addressed by Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer in early May to the leaders of both Georgia and Adjara urging them to resolve their differences by means of peaceful dialogue, Georgian media reported the following day. Konstantine

Gabashvili, who chairs the Georgian parliament's commission on foreign relations, told journalists on 10 May that the Georgian Foreign Ministry has formally requested that the Council of Europe recall its representative Plamen Nikolov, on whose "inaccurate" reports of the situation Gabashvili said Schwimmer's appeal was based. But on 11 May, Caucasus Press quoted a Council of Europe spokesperson as saying that no such request for Nikolov's recall has been received.

05/12/04 - Georgian President says soccer violence was not ethnic conflict - Mediamax news agency

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said one should not consider the fight between Georgians and [ethnic] Armenians in the Tsalka region of Georgia as an ethnic conflict.

"I don't want to dramatize the situation. This is not an inter-ethnic conflict. It was a common fight between Georgians and Armenians. But we will not allow violation of law and order and we are not going to be involved in a provocation," the Georgian president said on 11 May. Mikheil Saakashvili noted that "after the developments in Ajaria, Georgia's enemies retreated."

(...)

05/14/04 - Some 1,000 Georgians Eager to Move to Tsalka – Asbarez Online

The Georgian ministry of refugees and resettlement reported that approximately 1000 applications have been submitted by Georgian families wishing to relocate to Georgia's Tsalka district. 150-strong unit of Interior Troops were dispatched to the southern multi-ethnic district of Tsalka on May 11, following clashes between local ethnic Armenians and Georgians on May 9. Several people were reportedly injured.

Ethnic Armenians comprise 57% of population of Tsalka district in the Kvemo Kartli region, which has a population of around 20,000, according to the Georgian department of statistics; 4,500 ethnic Greeks, 2,500 ethnic Georgians, and up to 2,000 Azeris live in the Tsalka district.

Local officials had described the clashes between ethnic Georgians and Armenians sporadic "communal violence," which has flared-up in the past several years.

05/17/04 – Georgian officials send mixed signals over Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newline

Chief of General Staff Major General Givi Iukuridze and Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava denied on 14 and 15 May respectively that Tbilisi is planning a new military campaign to bring the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia back under the control of the central government, ITAR-TASS and Caucasus Press reported. Speaking in Bucharest on 15 May, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said that if Georgia needs "another revolution," that revolution will occur in Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported on 17 May. On 12 May, batuminews.com as cited by Groong reported that about 16 people, mostly Armenians, staged a demonstration in Sukhum, displaying placards calling on Saakashvili to resolve the conflict with Abkhazia.

05/19/04 – Georgian Parliament drafts amendments on status of Adjara - RFE/RL Newline

Deputies gave preliminary approval on 18 May to a bill drafted by President Mikheil Saakashvili on amending the Georgian Constitution to clarify the relations between the central government and the Adjar Autonomous Republic, Georgian media reported. The draft bill, which will be published for public debate and must be passed before the election on 20 June of a new Adjar legislature, gives Adjara "very broad autonomy" but at the same time empowers the Georgian president to dismiss the Adjar Supreme Council (parliament) and Executive Council (government), Caucasus Press reported. In a related move, the Georgian parliament also voted on 18 May to abolish the State Security ministries of the Adjar Autonomous Republic and within the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government-in-exile.

05/19/04 – Georgian supreme court rejects opposition appeal over Adjara status - RFE/RL Newsline

The Georgian Supreme Court on 18 May rejected an opposition appeal aimed at mobilizing support for a nationwide referendum on Adjara's autonomous status, Caucasus Press reported. The opposition Labor Party was appealing the refusal on 11 May by the Central Election Commission to register the party's application for permission to collect signatures for a petition calling for such a plebiscite. Other opposition parties, including Industrialists/New Rightists bloc, likewise advocate stripping Adjara of its autonomy, according to the website of the independent television station Rustavi-2 (<http://www.rustavi2.com>) on 14 May.

05/26/04 – Human-rights activists accuse Georgian police of torture - RFE/RL Newsline

An NGO representing former political prisoners staged a demonstration outside the Interior Ministry in Tbilisi on 25 May to protest the beating and torture by police of detainees, Georgian media reported. Interfax quoted activist Nana Kakabadze as saying that up to 50 detainees have been subjected to torture over the past three months. Unveiling a new concept last month to reform the Interior Ministry, President Saakashvili noted that its methods have improved insofar as people are no longer thrown out of windows or found to have committed suicide during interrogation; at the same time he stressed that police need to clean up their image, according to Caucasus Press on 16 April.

05/26/04 - President to Grant Dual Citizenship to Georgians Living Abroad - Civil Georgia

President Saakashvili said on May 26 that he will issue a special decree on granting dual citizenship to those Georgians, who currently live abroad.

"Under the Constitution of Georgia, I have the right to grant dual citizenship. So, each Georgian, who currently lives abroad, will have a possibility to receive dual

citizenship," President Saakashvili said at a military parade on May 26. He said, the authorities should implement relevant measures to ensure that Georgian emigres return to their native country.

05/27/04 – Both of which reject it - RFE/RL Newsline

Raul Khadjimba, who is prime minister of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, dismissed the formation of a single state comprising Georgia and Abkhazia as "out of the question," Interfax and Caucasus Press reported on 26 May. Khadjimba stressed that the republic's population has already affirmed its support in a referendum for the constitution, which defines Abkhazia as an independent sovereign state. In Tskhinvali, capital of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, Foreign Minister Murad Djioev similarly told Interfax that the republic "is a sovereign state." Djioev said the South Ossetian leadership is ready for talks with Tbilisi on resolving the decade-old conflict between them, but not on creating a unified state.

ADJARIE / ADJARIA

03/08/04 – Georgian President increases pressure on Adjara - RFE/RL Newsline

President Saakashvili further voiced the suspicion that Adjara security officials are spying on the central Georgian government, Caucasus Press reported. Saakashvili said a bill will be submitted to parliament abolishing the Adjara State Security Ministry on the grounds that Georgia needs only one such ministry. Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Abashidze responded on 7 March that the status and functions of the Adjara State Security Ministry are defined by the autonomous republic's constitution, ITAR-TASS reported. Interfax on 7 March quoted Abashidze as describing Saakashvili's statement as "bold and dangerous," while Caucasus Press the following day quoted him as commenting that "to want [to do something] does not mean to be able [to do it]."

03/12/04 - Russian embassy in Georgia denies Moscow sending extra troops to Ajaria - RIA news agency

The Russian embassy to Georgia has denied Georgian media reports that an additional contingent of Russian servicemen is being sent to Ajaria (one of Georgia's autonomous republics).

"This is a routine rotation which the Georgian leadership, Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry were informed of in advance," the embassy's press service told Novosti-Gruziya agency [the Georgian service of RIA news agency].

A routine replacement of servicemen at the 12th Russian military base in Ajaria is taking place at the moment, the embassy explained.

According to the diplomatic mission, 78 servicemen from the base at Gyumri (in Armenia) arrived at the base on 12 March, and another 44 servicemen will arrive there over the next few days. An equivalent number of servicemen are to leave the base during the rotation. Altogether 188 servicemen will be replaced during the rotation, the embassy added.

"All the servicemen arriving at the 12th Russian base in Ajaria have Georgian visas, the lists with their names have been submitted to the appropriate Georgian authorities," the press service stressed.

The embassy recalled that this is not the first time such reports have appeared in the Georgian media of late. "The embassy asks all journalists to be precise in their reporting. We are willing to answer any questions," was the assurance from the press service.

03/13/04 - Ajarian leader appeals to international community to stop Georgia - RIA news agency

The leader of the Ajarian Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze, has called upon the international community to stop Tbilisi in its attempts to put pressure on Ajaria.

"I want to bring our voice to the leading international organizations, both European and international, including the Council of Europe, the UN Security Council and to our neighbours, Russia, Turkey,

Azerbaijan and Armenia, to the leaders of the leading countries of Europe, to stop the violence which will bring grave consequences in its wake," he said at a news conference in Moscow today. (...)

03/15/04 - Adjar authorities detain Georgian finance Minister - RFE/RL Newline

The Adjar authorities upped the ante on 13 March, when Adjar special forces briefly detained Georgian Finance Minister Zurab Nogaideli and Georgian journalists who were accompanying him in Khelvachauri, southeast of Batumi, Georgian media reported. Earlier that day, members of Abashidze's Union for Democratic Revival prevented Nogaideli from meeting with voters in Keda, east of Khelvachauri.

03/15/04 - And refuse entry to President - RFE/RL Newline

President Saakashvili was halted on 14 March at the Choloki border post between Adjara and the rest of Georgia by several dozen men armed with submachine guns and bazookas and backed by armored personnel carriers, Caucasus Press reported, quoting Georgian National Security Council Secretary Vano Merabishvili. Abashidze, however, told journalists later that day that Saakashvili and his entourage were intercepted 30 kilometers from the internal border, according to Interfax. Abashidze's son, Giorgi, who is mayor of Batumi, told journalists that Saakashvili is free to enter Adjara as long as he is not accompanied by armed men, Caucasus Press reported. Saakashvili retreated to the Black Sea town of Poti, where Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania joined him for talks.

03/15/04 - Aslan Abashidze Called on Russia to Stop Rose Revolution in Adjara - RIA OREANDA

Aslan Abashidze claims that the Georgian authorities are preparing military invasion of the republic. Mr. Abashidze considers that they are trying to repeat the so-called Rose Revolution in Adjara, - according to NTV.

The Georgian authorities are gathering 100 thousand people, men and women, from all the regions of the country. People with military training and those who participated in similar actions will be among them. All of them will come to the border of the autonomous republic and women will be ahead them, Adjara head claimed.

Mr. Abashidze also called on the world community to stop Tbiisi authorities attempts to exert pressure on Adjara. I want to tell our opinion to influential world organizations and to our neighbors Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia in order to stop the force that will bring lamentable consequences, Aslan Abashidze claimed in the course of press-conference in Moscow.

03/15/04 - Council of Europe calls for dialogue, offers expertise - RFE/RL Newline

Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer appealed on 14 March to both Saakashvili and Abashidze to start a real dialogue instead of waging a war of words, Interfax reported. He reminded them that as a member of the Council of Europe, Georgia must abide by democratic principles. Speaking in Tbilisi later on 14 March, Schwimmer's special representative Plamen Nikolov said one of the reasons for the ongoing tensions between the central Georgian government and Abashidze is the lack of a clear legal foundation defining relations between the central government and the autonomous republic, ITAR-TASS reported. He again offered the Council of Europe's expertise in drafting such a document.

03/16/04 - Georgian President imposes blockade - RFE/RL Newline

Even before the expiration late on 15 March local time of his 14 March ultimatum to Adjar leader Abashidze, President Saakashvili issued orders to close the airport in Batumi and the border crossing to Turkey at Sarp, and to inspect all cargo entering Adjara via the port of Batumi, Russian and Georgian media reported. Saakashvili said the latter measures are necessary in order to prevent arms being supplied to Abashidze's loyalists,

Reuters reported. Saakashvili appealed to the Turkish leadership to close the Sarp border crossing. Also on 15 March, Saakashvili rejected as "a dirty lie" reports that he intends to abolish Adjara's autonomous status, Interfax reported. He hinted that the blockade could be lifted after the 28 March parliamentary election.

03/26/04 - Adjar leaders' diplomatic passports revoked - RFE/RL Newline

The diplomatic passports of more than 500 Adjar officials -- including Adjar State Council Chairman Abashidze; his son, Giorgi, who is mayor of Batumi; and Interior Minister Djemal Gogitidze -- have been revoked in order "to remind them that it is inadmissible to exceed their competencies," Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze announced on 24 March, Caucasus Press reported. President Saakashvili ordered a review of all diplomatic passport holders last month after former President Shevardnadze's son-in-law, Gia Djokhtaberidze, was apprehended at Tbilisi airport as he was about to leave the country on a diplomatic passport.

03/31/04 - Adjar leader accuses Georgian authorities of vote rigging - RFE/RL Newline

Adjar Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze accused the Georgian authorities on 30 March of seeking to predetermine the outcome of the 28 March parliamentary ballot by delivering to his autonomous republic less than half the number of voter registration forms needed, Georgian news agencies reported. Abashidze claimed that as a result, 52.5 percent of voters were unable to participate in the election. On 31 March, Abashidze's press secretary Tamar Gudava said that the autonomous republic's parliament will discuss holding a referendum in which all voters will be required to stipulate for which party they voted on 28 March, Caucasus Press reported. Abashidze's representative in Tbilisi, Hamlet Chipashvili, said on 31 March that several thousand angry voters from Adjara will join the ongoing Labor Party protest in Tbilisi against the perceived falsification of the election outcome.

Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Gogi Khaindrava said the same day that the Georgian authorities will do nothing to hinder a march on Tbilisi by Abashidze's supporters, Caucasus Press reported.

04/05/04 - (...) Georgian President sends envoys to Adjara and fires local army commander - RFE/RL Newsline

President Saakashvili dispatched two presidential envoys to Adjara on 4 April to reassert central government control and oversight over the customs posts at the port of Batumi and the Sarp border crossing with Turkey, Civil Georgia and Rustavi-2 reported. This marks the second attempt by the government to restore control over the Adjara customs regime. The first attempt by presidential envoys was rebuffed in March by local Adjara officials despite an 18 March agreement between President Saakashvili and Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze. The move follows Defense Minister Gela Bezhuashvili's dismissal on 3 April of the local commander of the Georgian Army's 25th Armored-Mechanized Brigade stationed in the Adjara capital. The Brigade commander, General Roman Dumbadze, was accused of gross insubordination after reportedly siding with Abashidze during a standoff between Tbilisi and Batumi last month when Georgian troops were placed on high alert, prompting 100 of the unit's soldiers to demand transfers to units loyal to the Georgian government. President Saakashvili also announced that he will send Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania to Adjara next week to discuss with Abashidze the draft redistribution of powers between Adjara and Georgia proper.

04/08/04 - Adjara parliament confirms new chairman - RFE/RL Newsline

The Adjara parliament confirmed the appointment of Rostom Djaparidze as the new chairman of the Adjara Council of Ministers on 6 April, ITAR-TASS reported. Nominated by Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze, Djaparidze replaces Revaz Shamelishvili. The 56-year-old Djaparidze is co-chairman of Abashidze's Union for

Democratic Revival party and has served as deputy speaker of the Georgian parliament since November 1999.

04/14/04 - Adjara leader rejects demand to disarm - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and National Security Council Secretary Vano Merabishvili failed during talks in Batumi on 13 April to persuade Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze to comply with President Mikheil Saakashvili's demand to disarm illegal armed groups, Russian and Georgian news agencies reported. Zhvania told journalists that Abashidze refused to address the issue, and characterized that refusal as "a provocation" and "a move towards confrontation." Rostom Djaparidze, who was named Adjara prime minister last week, said he finds Saakashvili's demand puzzling as "there are no missile systems or strategic bombers in Adjara," Interfax reported. In Tbilisi, Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze explained that "no one is against Aslan Abashidze or Adjara officials having personal guards, but it's inadmissible that thousands of residents of the autonomous republic illegally keep automatic weapons," ITAR-TASS reported. Djaparidze pointed out, as have other Adjara officials, that those weapons were distributed in the early 1990s when there was a danger that civil unrest elsewhere in Georgia would spill over into Adjara.

04/15/04 - Georgian President appeals to population of Adjara - RFE/RL Newsline

In a written address to the population of Georgia's Adjara Autonomous Republic on 14 April, Mikheil Saakashvili dismissed as "dirty lies" rumors that the Georgian leadership plans to abolish Adjara's autonomous status within Georgia, close mosques, and resettle in Adjara people from other regions of Georgia, Georgian media reported. Saakashvili said those lies are being disseminated by people engaged in criminal activities who have stolen money from the local population, an apparent allusion to Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze and his closest associates.

Speaking in Tbilisi the same day, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania said he hopes the international community will take on a more active role in trying to resolve the standoff between the central Georgian government and the Adjara authorities, ITAR-TASS reported. Zhvania said his government will draft a cooperation plan with international organizations to that end.

04/22/04 - Georgian interior Ministry commander pledges loyalty to Adjara leader - RFE/RL Newsline

Colonel Murad Tsintsadze, who commands the 3rd Division of Adjara's Interior Ministry forces, announced on 21 April that in response to what he termed psychological pressure from the Georgian authorities, he and his division will in future take their orders only from Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Abashidze, Reuters and Georgian media reported. Tsintsadze described as "a hero" Major General Roman Dumbadze, who has been pilloried by the Georgian press for his analogous decision earlier this month to pledge loyalty to Abashidze.

04/23/04 - Adjara leader accuses Tbilisi, but makes minor concession - RFE/RL Newsline

Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Abashidze accused the Georgian authorities on 22 April of planning to assassinate him, Georgian media reported. He said he has written to U.S. President George W. Bush asking him to prevent any such attack, and will address a similar request to the Russian leadership. Also on 22 April, Abashidze issued orders for the abolition of Adjara's State Security Ministry, having shrugged off Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's threat last month that the Georgian Parliament would adopt a bill on doing so. Abashidze said that the ministry will be replaced by two separate agencies subordinate to him, one that will combat terrorism and the second drug-trafficking. In his address to the opening session of the Georgian Parliament on 22 April, President Saakashvili echoed Baramidze's allegations that Abashidze himself is implicated in

drug-trafficking; Saakashvili branded him a "narco-baron."

04/26/04 – Georgian President threatens war against Adjara - RFE/RL Newline

Speaking on 24 April in Tbilisi at a military parade to mark the conclusion of the two-year U.S.-funded Train and Equip program for the Georgian armed forces, President Mikheil Saakashvili claimed that Georgia "faces the threat of disintegration," and that he will not hesitate to use the armed forces to preserve the country's territorial integrity, Caucasus Press and ITAR-TASS reported. "We will not allow anyone to intimidate and blackmail the government and people of Georgia," he said. That threat was clearly addressed at Adjar Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze, who is fighting to retain control over taxes and customs duties levied in Adjara but at the same time disclaims any intention to declare his republic independent of the rest of Georgia.

04/28/04 – U.S. calls for political solution in Adjara - RFE/RL Newline

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told journalists in Washington on 27 April after talks with visiting Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania that the United States hopes the Georgian central government will prove able to find political and economic solutions to the outstanding issues within the state of Georgia without recourse to violence, Caucasus Press reported. Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department has responded to Abashidze's letter requesting that Washington intervene to prevent an anticipated attempt by the Georgian authorities to assassinate Abashidze, Caucasus Press reported on 24 April. That response reportedly rejects as "absurd" Abashidze's fears that the United States is colluding with Tbilisi against him and reaffirms Washington's hope that the differences between Abashidze and the central Georgian government can be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the interests of the autonomous republic's population.

04/28/04 – Georgia War Games near Defiant Rebel Region - ASBAREZ Online

Georgia positioned more troops and armor close to Adjara on Wednesday for a major military exercise certain to fuel further tension with its rebel Black Sea region. The three-day Dioscuria-2004 maneuvers start on Friday as a standoff continues between new Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and Adjarian leader Aslan Abashidze over control of the region that has a lucrative oil port at Batumi. Abashidze, who has been engaged in verbal dueling with Saakashvili for weeks, denounced the exercise. "Tbilisi is heating up tensions to the extreme with such unprovoked actions," he told Russia's Itar-Tass news agency.

But Saakashvili, on a visit to Poland, said Adjara was not a target of the exercise at the Kulevi training ground 30 km (20 miles) from its border.

"No kind of military action can be taken anywhere in Georgia, especially in Adjara," Saakashvili told reporters in Warsaw. "In Adjara everything will be sorted out peacefully."

Adjara, is one of three regions that slipped out of Tbilisi's control after Georgia gained independence from the Soviet Union in late 1991.

But unlike separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which fought bloody wars with Tbilisi, Adjara has never claimed formal independence from Georgia. Nearly 2,000 servicemen from ex-Soviet Georgia's armed forces and a quarter of its 120 pieces of armor--tanks and armored vehicles--will take part in the exercise. Military aircraft were expected to arrive on Wednesday.

Georgia's Defense Ministry said the exercise will provide training on protecting oil pipelines from "terrorists" and on carrying out raids on illegal drug-producing laboratories.

Georgia's Black Sea coast has no major pipelines, but an international pipeline is under construction to take Caspian oil to the Mediterranean through the eastern part of the country. Tbilisi and the region came close to military confrontation last month after Saakashvili was initially blocked from entering the province. He subsequently traveled to the Adjarian regional capital of Batumi where he

held inconclusive crisis talks with Abashidze. Abashidze turned the region into a relatively prosperous personal fiefdom amid turmoil across Georgia in the 1990s. Adjara, which apart from the oil port hosts a key customs point on Georgia's border with Turkey, does not contribute to the national budget and has its own military force. Saakashvili, who became president after leading a bloodless coup against former President and ex-Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze last November, has promised to restore Tbilisi's control over the whole country and has accused Abashidze of turning Adjara into a haven for criminals.

04/30/04 – Russian Duma official warns against use of force in Georgia's Adjara - RIA news agency

Andrey Kokoshin, chairman of the State Duma Committee on the CIS and Relations with Compatriots, has warned against attempts by Georgia to resolve the Adjara problem by force.

"Developments with regard to Adjara is causing great concern yet again," Andrey Kokoshin has told RIA-Novosti.

In his view, "the destabilization of the situation in the region caused by the Georgian authorities' attempts to resolve this problem by force directly touches on the interests of Russia's national security. This was stated in the Duma's recent appeal to Georgian MPs."(...)

05/03/04 – Adjar leader orders destruction of border bridges - RFE/RL Newline

On orders from Adjar leader Aslan Abashidze, two bridges linking his autonomous republic with the rest of Georgia were blown up on 2 May, Caucasus Press and Reuters reported. Abashidze argued that the move was necessary in the light of the largescale maneuvers by the Georgian military that began on the Georgian side of the border two days earlier, and which he feared presage military aggression against Adjara. Adjar opposition leader Tamaz Diasamidze said on 2 May that Abashidze also ordered that railway tracks from Georgia to Adjara be dismantled on the Adjar side.

05/03/04 – Council of Europe calls for dialogue over Adjara - RFE/RL Newsline

Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer has expressed profound concern at the destruction of the border bridges, Caucasus Press reported on 3 May. Schwimmer appealed to both Abashidze and Saakashvili to "do their utmost to stop this extremely dangerous escalation," and again reaffirmed the council's readiness to "facilitate dialogue and to help Georgia develop a sound legal basis for the relations between the central authorities and the autonomous regions."

05/06/04 – Adjar leader steps down, leaves Georgia after his support base crumbles - RFE/RL Newsline

Aslan Abashidze resigned late on 5 May as Adjar Supreme Council Chairman and reportedly flew to Moscow together with Russian Security Council Chairman Igor Ivanov, who had traveled first to Tbilisi then to Batumi earlier that day after Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili discussed by telephone with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin the possibility of Russia offering political asylum to Abashidze and his closest entourage. Abashidze had affirmed earlier on 5 May that he would not resign, but speaking on Adjar television after four hours of talks with Ivanov he thanked his supporters and asked them to disperse and return to their homes. By late on 5 May, most of Adjara's police and border guards had withdrawn their support for Abashidze, as had Adjar Interior Minister Djemal Gogitidze, who met with Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania on the border between Adjara and the rest of Georgia and received from him assurances of immunity.

05/07/04 – Former Adjar leader's post abolished - RFE/RL Newsline

The Supreme Council of the Adjar Autonomous Republic voted late on 6 May to abolish the position of republican head occupied until the previous day by Abashidze, Georgian media reported. The

legislature of the autonomous republic also scheduled new parliamentary elections within 40 days and then dissolved itself. Also on 6 May, President Saakashvili named Georgian Railways Director Levan Varsholamidze to head an interim council that will rule Adjara until new elections are held. ITAR-TASS on 6 May quoted Rostom Djaparidze as saying he has resigned from the post of Adjar prime minister and that the remaining ministers will also resign, but that he does not plan to leave Adjara. Abashidze named Djaparidze prime minister last month. Also on 6 May, Abashidze's representative in Tbilisi, Hamlet Chipashvili, told Caucasus Press that Abashidze's political party, the Union for Democratic Revival, will be dissolved.

05/10/04 – Former Adjar officials arrested - RFE/RL Newsline

At least five senior Adjar officials have been arrested since the resignation and departure for Moscow on 5 May of Adjar Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze. Murad Tsintsadze and his son Merab, both of them senior Interior Ministry personnel, were detained in Batumi on 8 May, Caucasus Press reported, as was Kobuleti Governor Tariel Khalvashi, the man responsible for barring Saakashvili from entering Adjara in mid-March. Khalvashi has been charged with persecuting the opposition to Abashidze and illegally distributing weapons to the population. Roland Beridze, who headed the personal security guards of Abashidze's son, former Batumi Mayor Giorgi Abashidze, has also been arrested, according to Caucasus Press on 8 May. Interfax on 9 May reported the detention of former Adjar Security Minister Giorgi Kupreishvili.

05/28/04 – Georgian oppositionists campaign for referendum on Adjar autonomy - RFE/RL Newsline

Parliament deputies Koba Davitashvili and Zviad Dzidziguri traveled to Batumi earlier this week to begin collecting signatures to a petition demanding that a referendum be held to determine whether residents of Adjara want the region to retain its autonomous status, Georgian media reported on

27 May. Interfax on 27 May quoted Davitashvili, a former close associate of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, as saying most of the region's residents would vote against preserving autonomy. In response to the campaign launched by Davitashvili and Dzidziguri, Deputy Security Minister Gigi Ugulava and Giga Bokeria, a parliament deputy from the majority National Movement-Democrats, traveled on 27 May to Batumi where they assured students that Saakashvili has no intention of abolishing Adjara's autonomous status, the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported.

ABKHAZIA / ABKHAZIE

03/04/04 – Georgian Minister says progress reached in Moscow talks on Abkhaz settlement - RFE/RL Newsline

During talks in Moscow on 2 March, Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Gogi Khaindrava and Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchinin reached agreement that the return of Georgian displaced persons to Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion and the resumption of rail traffic from the Russian Federation via Abkhazia to Tbilisi and Yerevan should begin simultaneously, Caucasus Press reported on 4 March. The two processes were agreed upon one year ago during a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his then-Georgian counterpart Eduard Shevardnadze, but the Georgian and Abkhaz governments have been unable to agree which process should begin first, or whether one should be completed before the start of the second.

03/18/04 – Georgian displaced persons protest election of new exile parliament head - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian displaced persons who fled their homes in Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war have taken issue with the election of Temur Mzhavia as chairman of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz parliament in exile, Caucasus Press reported on 17 March. A spokesman for the displaced persons told the agency

they do not know who Mzhavia is or what, if anything, he has ever done on their behalf. Mzhavia reportedly joined President Saakashvili's National Movement days before his election to head the exile legislature.

03/19/04 - Abkhaz authorities eliminate right to mother-tongue - The Georgian Messenger

Regretting the fact that the local de facto government has repeatedly refused to open a branch of the UN Human Rights office in Gali, the head of the UN Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Ivar Vikki, said there many other barriers to human rights protection in the breakaway republic.

"The situation is precarious," he said on Thursday, explaining that the lack of effective law enforcement, the infiltration of criminal groups, the lack of a mechanism to file complaints and the recent reform of language curriculum all impede human rights. Currently the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia operates a human rights office in Sukhumi where locals can come and state violations.

"And they do have complaints," noted MR. Vikki.

Most issued relate to property disputes within the region.

The UN office also conducts regular visits to pretrial detention centers. Speaking with the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia Roza Otunbayeva, Mr. Vikki also criticized the de facto authorities for language reform that eliminates the right to study in the mother tongue.

Currently there are 41 official Armenian schools and 10 unofficial Georgian schools in the region.

03/29/04 - Abducted Georgian NGO head released - RFE/RL Newsline

David Badzagua, who was abducted by Abkhaz gunmen in Abkhazia's Gali Raion in January, was handed over to Georgian police on 26 March, Caucasus Press reported. Badzagua told the independent Georgian TV station Rustavi-2 that his captors informed him that he was taken hostage because of his activities as head of an NGO that promotes friendship between young Georgians and Abkhaz.

04/26/04 - Georgian, Abkhaz officials meet - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian and Abkhaz government delegations headed by Minister for Conflict Resolution Gogi Khaindrava and Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba, respectively, participated in discussions on 22-23 April organized by the Geneva Center for Security Policy, Caucasus Press reported. The talks, attended also by Russian officials and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative for Abkhazia, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, focused on confidence-building measures and the provision of security guarantees for Georgians who fled Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war and wish to return permanently to their abandoned homes.

Caucasus Press on 23 April quoted Shamba as telling RIA-Novosti that the new Georgian leadership has abandoned the approach espoused by its predecessor of seeking to negotiate from a position of strength.

05/03/04 - Mandates of exiled Abkhaz Parliamentarians revoked - RFE/RL Newsline

After a four-hour discussion, the Georgian parliament's judicial and procedure committees jointly ruled on 30 April to annul the mandates of 10 Georgian deputies elected in late 1991 to the parliament of Abkhazia, and who since the end of the 1992-1993 civil war have been ex officio deputies of the Georgian parliament, Caucasus Press reported. Those 10 seats in the Georgian parliament will remain vacant until the central government restores its control over the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia.

05/14/04 - Date set for next round of Abkhaz-Georgian talks - RFE/RL Newsline

Abkhaz presidential aide Astamur Tania revealed on 13 May that negotiations between Georgian and Abkhaz officials will resume in Sukhum on 20 May, according to Interfax. The negotiations, part of a series of talks brokered by UN special envoy Heidi Tagliavini, are to be held under the auspices of the United Nations' Friends of Georgia Group, comprising France,

Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Abkhaz leader explained that the two sides "will discuss proposals of the parties concerning establishment of an international security guarantee mechanism," adding, "Only international guarantees can prevent a rise in tensions."

05/14/04 - Abkhazia anticipates new Georgian aggression - RFE/RL Newsline

Vyacheslav Eshba, defense minister of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, has written to the head of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia, Major General Kazi Ashfaq Ahmed, accusing the Georgian leadership of planning to violate the protocol signed by the two sides two years ago by deploying additional troops to the Kodori Gorge, Apsnipress reported on 14 May. Eshba alleged that the Georgian leadership plans to destabilize the situation in the Abkhaz conflict zone by simulating an uprising in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion and then sending troops to occupy that district. He claimed weapons and portraits of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili are being transported to Gali in preparation for the planned uprising. Interfax on 13 May similarly quoted Abkhaz Security Service head Givi Agrba as saying that Georgia plans to send troops to Kodori and to destabilize Gali, possibly on the eve of the 26 May celebrations to mark the anniversary of the declaration in 1918 of an independent Georgian republic. Kodori Governor Emzar Kvitsiani denied on 14 May that any further Georgian troops will be sent to Kodori, Caucasus Press reported. Also on 13 May, Abkhaz Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba left for his second visit to Moscow in 10 days, Caucasus Press reported.

05/18/04 - Abkhaz settlement plan published - RFE/RL Newsline

Rustavi-2 made public on 18 May details of a new plan to resolve the Abkhaz conflict, Caucasus Press reported. Rustavi-2 said that plan, proposed by Moscow, defines Georgia as a federal state within which Abkhazia is a sovereign entity, and is similar to the "Basic Principles for the Distribution of

Competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" drafted by former UN special representative Dieter Boden. But "The Georgian Messenger" on 14 May as cited by Groong claimed the new Russian plan envisages not a federation but a confederation. That publication predicted that the Georgian leadership, which hitherto rejected the confederation model, will agree to it on condition that provision is made for the Georgian displaced persons who fled Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war to return to their abandoned homes.

05/21/04 – UN chairs new Abkhaz-Georgian talks - RFE/RL Newsline

Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, who is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative for the Abkhaz conflict, chaired a meeting in Sukhum on 20 May between Abkhaz and Georgian ministers to discuss additional security measures in the Abkhaz conflict zone, Georgian and Russian agencies reported.

The commanders of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the Russian peacekeeping force deployed in the conflict zone were also present, together with several Western diplomats.

The Abkhaz and Georgian representatives reiterated their commitment not to resume hostilities and agreed on the need to resume joint patrols by UNOMIG and Russian forces of the Kodori Gorge. But Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba again objected to the deployment in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion of a UN police force to guarantee the safety of Georgian displaced persons who wish to return to Gali, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. Shamba did, however, endorse the idea of dispatching no more than 10-12 international police to Gali to act as observers and advise local police officers.

05/24/04 – Georgian Minister demands investigation of Chechen attack on Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newsline

Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava told the independent television station Rustavi-2 on 23 May that he has written to the Prosecutor-General's Office proposing an official

investigation into "the circumstances in which [Chechen field commander] Ruslan Gelaev and his gang appeared in the Kodori Gorge in autumn 2001," ITAR-TASS and the Caucasus Press reported. A force believed to have included both Chechen fighters and Georgian guerrillas infiltrated Kodori in late September 2001 but withdrew after clashes with the Abkhaz military. The Georgian authorities have never provided a convincing explanation of how the Chechens travelled, undetected, several hundred kilometers across northern Georgia from the Pankisi Gorge to Kodori. Observers have suggested that the Georgian leadership under former President Eduard Shevardnadze may have co-opted the Chechens in a bid to win back control over Abkhazia.

05/24/04 - Ethnic communities in Abkhazia object to Georgian jurisdiction - Interfax

Ethnic communities in Abkhazia are against plans to restore Georgian jurisdiction over the self-proclaimed republic.

"The Russian, Armenian, Greek, Estonian, Ukrainian, Polish and German communities in Abkhazia declare that the Georgian administration's hopes to gain support for their expansionist plans are unfounded," says a statement from Abkhazia's ethnic communities circulated on Monday.

"The Georgian authorities, which are planning to 'peacefully' restore their jurisdiction over the territory of our republic, claim that certain forces, including representatives of certain ethnic communities in Abkhazia, allegedly support the intentions of this potential aggressor," the statement says.

"We, the various nationalities in Abkhazia, strongly support the constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, which proclaims independent, sovereign and democratic development of our state," the statement says. "The multinational people of Abkhazia, who have had to struggle for freedom and economic and cultural development, will not allow anyone to encroach on their homeland, Apsny."

05/25/04 – Abkhaz Parliament, minorities condemn Georgian threat of military force - RFE/RL Newsline

The Abkhaz parliament adopted a statement on 24 May condemning as "an encroachment on the rights and freedoms of a sovereign state" the recent hints by Georgian politicians, including President Mikheil Saakashvili, that Tbilisi might attempt to repeat in Abkhazia and South Ossetia the popular protests that culminated in the resignation earlier this month of Aslan Abashidze, leader of the Adjar Autonomous Republic, ITAR-TASS and Caucasus Press reported. Also on 24 May, representatives of the Russian, Armenian, Greek, Estonian, Polish, and Ukrainian communities in Abkhazia issued a statement affirming their support for the unrecognized republic's constitution, which defines Abkhazia as an independent sovereign state. They denied Georgian claims that they would support the return of Abkhazia to the jurisdiction of the central government.

05/25/04 – Abkhazia denies plans to introduce national currency - RFE/RL Newsline

Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba denied on 24 May a statement attributed to him earlier that day by Caucasus Press that the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia is about to introduce its own national currency, Interfax reported. Shamba said Abkhazia wants instead to preserve "a common economic and financial space" with Russia as an associate member of the Russian Federation. Astamur Tania, an adviser to Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba, likewise said that "the Russian ruble will remain in circulation in Abkhazia," Caucasus Press reported on 24 May.

05/25/04 – Or deploy Cossack forces - RFE/RL Newsline

Abkhaz Interior Minister Abesalom Beya denied on 24 May that Cossack forces have been deployed in the unrecognized republic's southernmost Gali Raion, Interfax reported. Earlier on 24 May, the Caucasus Press reported that Georgian residents of Gali were

fleeing the district because Cossacks were breaking into their homes, ostensibly to search for weapons, and robbing and beating them. Beya said a group of Kuban Cossacks travelled to Sukhum on 22 May to participate in a ceremony but have since left Abkhazia.

05/26/04 - Breakaway region's PM rejects Georgian leader's single-state proposal - Interfax

Abkhaz Prime Minister Raul Khajimba has rejected a proposal from Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to unite in a single Georgian state. The Georgian president made this proposal to the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and [South] Ossetia.

"There can be no discussion of unification between Abkhazia and Georgia in a single state," Khajimba told Interfax on Wednesday [26 May]. "Abkhazia has finally established its status. The republic has adopted the constitution of an independent state and the status of Abkhazia cannot and will not be subject to discussion," the Abkhaz prime minister said. "As regards the wishes of the Georgian side, wishes do not always correspond to reality," Khajimba said.

05/27/04 - Georgian President renews "autonomy" offer to Abkhazia, South Ossetia - RFE/RL Newsline

Speaking on 26 May in Tbilisi at a ceremony to mark the anniversary of the declaration in 1918 of an independent Georgian state, Mikheil Saakashvili said that Georgia "is on the right path," Caucasus Press reported. He again said he is prepared to discuss with the leaders of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia "any model of a federal state" that would grant them "enlarged autonomy" and, in the case of Abkhazia, international guarantees of security, Georgian media reported. That proposal is in line with the new plan unveiled last week that defines Georgia as a federal state within which Abkhazia is a sovereign entity (...)

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

03/23/04 - Arrest by Georgian police sparks protest in South Ossetia - RFE/RL Newsline

A demonstration is under way in Tskhinvali, capital of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, to protest the arrest following a shootout with Georgian police on 16 March of Marik Dudaev, Interfax reported on 22 March, citing South Ossetian official Boris Chochiev. A Georgian official from the regional prosecutor's office identified Dudaev on 16 March as the head of a criminal gang responsible for several murders, kidnappings, and robberies. Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze subsequently claimed that Dudaev headed a group of "saboteurs" who were responsible for an explosion earlier on 16 March that caused minor damage to railway tracks near Mtskheta, Caucasus Press reported. The demonstrators in Tskhinvali are demanding that the OSCE Office in Tskhinvali intervene to secure the release of Dudaev, who was wounded in the shootout, according to Interfax.

04/19/04 - South ossetian consultations resume - RFE/RL Newsline

Representatives of the governments of Russia, Georgia, the Republic of North Ossetia (which is part of the Russian Federation), and Georgia's breakaway unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, together with the head of the OSCE Mission in Georgia, Roy Reeve, met on 16 April in Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital, Georgian media reported. The talks were the first since the ouster last November of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, and focused primarily on measures to improve the socioeconomic situation in Tskhinvali. The EU allocated 2.5 million euros (\$3 million) in February for that purpose. Participants also discussed the possibility of creating a body to liaise between the Georgian and South Ossetian Interior ministries, but failed to agree on its

composition, as the South Ossetians demanded that it also include representatives from North Ossetia, Caucasus Press reported.

05/18/04 - Georgian official rules out « velvet revolution » in South Ossetia - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava told Caucasus Press on 15 May that at a meeting in Tbilisi the previous day he briefed representatives from Russia, North Ossetia, and the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia on a new Georgian initiative to resolve the deadlocked conflict between the central Georgian government and South Ossetia. Khaindrava did not divulge details but excluded a repeat in South Ossetia of the Adjar scenario, which entailed mobilizing the local population to force the leadership to step down. Speaking in Moscow on 17 May, Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the State Duma International Affairs Committee, expressed concern that the Georgian leadership will attempt to apply the "Adjar scenario" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, ITAR-TASS reported.

05/18/04 - But fails to reassure local authorities - RFE/RL Newsline

Despite Khaindrava's statement, the authorities in South Ossetia have intensified security measures in the run-up to local parliamentary elections scheduled for 23 May, Interfax reported on 17 May, quoting South Ossetian Security Council Secretary Djemal Karkusov. Karkusov claimed that "both foreign and internal forces are interested in destabilizing the situation" in the unrecognized republic. A total of 54 candidates representing 16 political parties and movements have registered to contest the 19 seats in the South Ossetian legislature, Caucasus Press reported on 3 and 10 May.

No candidates have registered to contest four constituencies in which the population is predominantly Georgian.

05/21/04 – Georgian youth activists set sights on South Ossetia - RFE/RL Newline

The Information and Press Department of the government of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia reports that activists from the Georgian youth movement Kmara!, which spearheaded the protests last fall that culminated in Shevardnadze's ouster, have recently begun trying to mobilize the minority Georgian population of South Ossetia, Caucasus Press reported on 20 May. Also on 20 May, participants in a meeting in the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, to mark the 12th anniversary of the killing by Georgian forces of Ossetian refugees adopted an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin and State Duma Chairman Boris Gрызлов to recognize South Ossetia as an independent state and then accept it as a member of the Russian Federation, Caucasus Press reported. The meeting participants stressed that only Russia can guarantee South Ossetia's security and create conditions for its economy to flourish.

05/24/04 – South Ossetia holds Parliamentary election - RFE/RL Newline

Parliamentary elections were held on 23 May in Georgia's breakaway, unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, Russian and Georgian media reported. Preliminary returns show that the Unity Party of President Eduard Kokoity won a majority of 30 seats, half of which are distributed under the party list system and half in single-mandate constituencies. Four of the latter seats were reserved for the republic's Georgian population, but voting took place in only five predominantly Georgian-populated villages. On 21 May, South Ossetian Foreign Minister Murad Dzhoiev said that members of the Georgian youth movement Kmara! (Enough!) will be denied entry to South Ossetia, Interfax reported. Georgian media reported the previous day that Kmara! activists are trying to mobilize the local Georgian population to oust the South Ossetian leadership as a preliminary to formal recognition of Georgian hegemony. On 22 May, Kokoity likened the policies of

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to those of radical nationalist former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who formally abolished the republic's autonomy, Interfax reported. Kokoity affirmed that the people of South Ossetia remain committed to their pro-Russian orientation. Neither Georgia nor the international community recognize the polls as valid.

05/26/04 – South Ossetia denies attack on Georgian official - RFE/RL Newline

The Information and Press Committee of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia issued a statement on 25 May denying that Ossetian police launched an attack on Georgian district Governor Mikheil Kareli, Caucasus Press reported. Kareli told journalists that South Ossetian police opened fire on his car near the Ergneti market on the outskirts of Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital. The South Ossetian statement said Kareli's driver ignored a police demand to halt the car.

05/28/04 – South Ossetia plans to unite with northern neighbor - RFE/RL Newline

Zurab Kokoev, leader of the Unity party that won 20 of the 30 parliament mandates in an unrecognized election in the breakaway Republic of South Ossetia on 23 May, told Caucasus Press on 27 May that the new parliament will pass legislation on the republic's unification with the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, which is a subject of the Russian Federation. The Communist Party polled second place in the 23 May ballot followed by the People's Party.

JAVAKHK / DJAVAKHK

03/09/04 - Ethnic Armenians in Georgia against Azeri oil pipeline - Yerkir

During his recent visit to Baku, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, speaking about the security of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan

oil pipeline, said that the Armenians living in the regions that will be bisected by the pipeline have no problems with the construction of the pipeline.

The Armenian population of Tsalka, Borjomi and Akhaltsikha, however, have been continuously voicing their complaints about it.

The residents of the Armenian-populated village of Tapatskur in the Borjomi region have not yet received compensation for the property taken from them for the pipeline.

03/10/04 - Defusing interethnic tensions in Javakheti Region - The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

In November 2003, ECMI was granted funding for its project on "Defusing interethnic tension and promoting regional integration - the Javakheti Region of the Republic of Georgia". By establishing a network consisting of civil society actors that includes representatives for most ethno-religious groups as well as government officials in two predominantly Armenian districts in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti Province, the project seeks to improve inter-ethnic relations, to broaden the consultative process of decision-making, and to increase effective public participation and public awareness on local governance. The project will promote regional integration of the region by involving province and state level policy-makers in the network, thereby creating firmer links between regional actors and central levels of authority. In conjunction with the network, the project will enhance the capacity of less advanced regional communities through capacity building training and community mobilisation efforts in order to encourage broad participation in the consultative process.

The project grants, amounting to 35,000 EUR by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 35,000 EUR by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been provided to cover the initial 3 month project phase. Due to the revolutionary events in Georgia in November 2003, the initiation of the project was postponed to February 2004.

03/11/04 - Georgia introduces two-language ballot papers for ethnic minorities - Kavkasia-Press news agency

Voters living in the Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti Regions [largely populated, respectively, by ethnic Azeris and Armenians] will be provided with two-language ballot papers [in the 28 March parliamentary election], Georgia's Central Electoral Commission [CEC] Chairman Zurab Chiaberashvili said at the commission's meeting today. Chiaberashvili said that the ballot papers will be published in the Georgian and Azeri languages in the Kvemo Kartli Region and in the Georgian and Armenian languages in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region. The CEC plans to publish 3m ballot papers for the entire country. [...]

03/17/04 - Armed Turks infiltrate Georgia's Armenian-populated region - agency - Arminfo

Armed citizens of Turkey constantly infiltrate Georgia's Akhalkalaki region without official permission, A-Info news agency reports.

According to the source, the Javakhk section of the Georgian-Turkish border is virtually unprotected.

The Armenian-populated village of Kartsakh in the Akhalkalaki region is particularly vulnerable.

The infiltration of Turkish citizens into Akhalkalaki has become more frequent since the Turkish side started supplying Georgian border posts with electricity.

03/18/04 - Javakhk Armenians Concur with CE Secretary General, Request Meeting - Asbarez Online

Representatives of Javakhk Armenian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), have expressed full agreement with Council of Europe (CE) Secretary General Walter Schwimmer's calls for a decentralized structure in Georgia, and increased authority to regional and local authorities. "In recent months, we have appealed to the highest authorities of Georgia, fully supporting certain constitutional reforms that ensure Georgia's sovereignty and integrity, while establishing a confederate

structure," the NGOs stated in a March 11 letter to the Secretary General, which was presented to the CE Information Office in Tbilisi on Wednesday. During his most recent formal talks with President Saakashvili and other Georgian authorities in late February, Schwimmer advocating a decentralized structure for Georgia, said. "Of course, this means that Council of Europe standards with respect to the rule of law, human rights and pluralist democracy have to be implemented at all levels." Javakhk's NGOs, pointing to violations of the Georgia's constitution, said that the region has been deprived of fundamental human and ethnic minority rights that are not only guaranteed by the Constitution and affirmed by international standards, but also necessary for establishing a democratic and civil society. "In fact, the process of fulfilling the country's commitments to the Council of Europe has failed. Rejection of the constitutionally-guaranteed principle of self-governance has left many regions of the country to their fate, resulting in current dangerous developments," the NGOs stressed. In closing, the NGOs request a meeting with Schwimmer, and state that only a "civilized resolution" to the deep crisis will clarify the region's administrative borders, and grant autonomy by way of the constitution.

03/19/04 - Georgian Armenians appeal to Council of Europe over "violation" of rights - Arminfo

The political and socioeconomic crisis in Georgia is a result of problems that have not been resolved for many years, A-Info news agency has quoted representatives of the public organizations of Samtskhe-Javakheti as saying in a message to Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer.

The representatives of the public organizations point out that at present, human rights and the rights of ethnic minorities are being violated in Georgia and the country's commitments to the Council of Europe are, in fact, not being fulfilled. The state is not following the principle of self-government established by the constitution, which has a negative

impact on the development of the country's regions.

In this connection, such a situation is particularly topical in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the message said. The current administrative-territorial structure and governing policy do not take into account the peculiarities of the region and do not meet the people's needs. In fact, Samtskhe-Javakheti has been pushed out of the process of governing the country, the letter says.

Programmes on the socioeconomic development of the region, which would meet the interests of the population, are not being implemented in the region and the population's poverty is approaching a threatening scale.

The authors of the message believe that in order to extricate the region from the crisis, it is necessary to delineate the administrative borders of the region and endorse its autonomous status in the country's constitution. The representatives of the public organizations also expressed a desire to discuss regional issues with Walter Schwimmer.

03/25/04 - Javakhk Council of NGOs Throws Support behind Saakashvili Party - Asbarez Online

During its March 24 general session, the Council of Armenian non-governmental organizations (NGO) of Javakhk adopted a statement in support of the National Movement party in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Their support lies in the bloc's 'practical approach to carrying out reforms in the country,' reads the statement, stating that the number of Armenian candidates running on the party's ballot was also a consideration.

The council stresses the significance of the May 28 elections in deciding the future of the country. With an interest in the establishment of stability in Georgia, the council expressed readiness to contribute to the holding of fair elections, concluding that 'constitutional reforms and the establishment of democratic values will give an opportunity to resolve the problems of the population of Javakhk. Formed by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, the National Movement was the

opposition party during the Shevardnadze administration.

03/29/04 – Armenians in Javakhk supporting the governing bloc - A1 Plus

Ruling "National Movement-Democrats" Bloc won absolute majority of votes in Javakhk region at the parliamentary elections in Georgia. It gained 90% in Akhalqalaq District, 70% in Tsalka, and 80% of votes in Akhaltskha. About 90% of Javakhk electorate partook in the elections.

04/23/04 – Georgian police pull out stone cross in commemoration of genocide victims - ArmenPress

Georgian police officers have pulled out a stone cross erected on a hill on the outskirts of Akhaltsikha down in western Georgia in commemoration of the Armenian genocide that was to be opened officially on April 24.

A local A-Info news agency reported that police officers detained Ludwig Petrosian, who was steering the work, who was released after spending 4 hours in custody. Petrosian later said that the cross stone was pulled out at the order of local governor Nikoloz Nikolozishvili (a former ambassador to Armenia) on grounds that the erection was not sanctioned by local authorities, however, Petrosian said the permission was given by Akhaltsikha municipality. Local Armenians were expected to organize a protest rally today morning.

04/24/04 – 2,000 residents of Akhaltsikh demand return of dismantled Khachqar-memorial to victims of Armenian genocide - Arminfo News

Friday over 2,000 residents of Akhaltsikh of Samtskhe-Javakheti, the mostly Armenian region of Georgia rallied in front of the office of the Georgian president's representative to the region. They demanded returning the earlier dismantled khachqar (cross stone) commemorating the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

To remind, the khachqar was dismantled by the regional police Friday morning. Before

disassembling the khachqar, the Police detained Head of the organizational committee on erection of the khachqar Lyudvig Petrossyan, kept him in the police station for 4 hours and released. According to Petrossyan, the khachqar was disassembled in conformity with a direct instruction by Plenipotentiary Representative of Georgia in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti Nikoloz Nikolozashvili "for lack of permission for its erection." However, Petrossyan insisted that the Akhaltsikh Municipality had allowed the khachqar's erection beforehand.

05/04/04 – Conflict between Armenians and Ajarians in Georgian region of Akhalkalaki - Arminfo News

A conflict took place on May 2 in the Azmana village, Akhalkalaki region, Georgia, between the Ajarians of Azmana village and the Armenians of the neighboring village of Kartsep.

According to A-INFO, Ajarians purposely destructed the fishing pool of Kartsep resident Telman Bambukhchyan.

The conflict resulted in a heavy injury of one Armenian. Besides, the owner of the pool received materials damage.

According to the source, the pool was destructed because one of the owner's relatives banned Ajarian children from fishing there. Later, rumors were spread that Armenians beat Ajarians. Soon, a quarrel started between the Armenians and Ajarians who came to help, which was stopped by the local police. According to Armenians of the region, Ajarians try to provoke ethnic conflict by their behavior.

05/06/04 – Clash in Akhalqalaq - A1 Plus

On May 4 collision occurred in Azmana village of Akhalqalaq. Adzharian villagers of Azmana being provoked by Georgian Misha Natenadze residing in the same village threw stones at the Armenian villagers. Then an attempt was made to bring about 50 young Adzharians from the neighboring Aspindza District to involve them in the conflict.

But the Armenian young people having arrived from Armenian villages of Akhalqalaq frightened the

Adzharians from Aspindza who left Akhalqalaq District.

Adzharians of Azmana hurled stones at Akhalqalaq District policemen who had arrived at the scene, too. To relax tension Nikoloz Nikolozashvili, Georgian President's envoy extraordinary in Samtskhe-Javakhq, arrived in Akhalqalaq. The local leadership and he managed to alleviate tension and to reconcile the sides. The Armenian part made concessions since the accident was just an attempt to cause an armed conflict between the Armenians and the Adzharians.

05/13/04 – Georgian first lady visited Samtskhe-Javakhetia - PanARMENIAN

May 12 spouse of the Georgian President Sandra Saakashvili visited the Samtskhe-Javakhetian region mostly populated by Armenians. She visited the market of Akhalkalaki town, familiarizing herself with local prices. Then Sandra Saakashvili visited Poka village of Ninotsminda region, where she met with acolytes of Georgian cloister complex recently founded on the Parvana lakeside.

05/18/04 - Georgian premier visits Armenian-populated region - Yerkir web site

Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania made an unofficial visit to Javakhk [Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region predominantly populated by Armenians] on 15 May, A-Info news agency reported.

He toured the Georgian church at the village of Poka on the shore of the lake Parvana, meeting with the nuns.

He also engaged in a conversation with the local residents, who asked the prime minister to provide the village with an antenna so that they could watch Georgian TV. Prime Minister Zhvania has not held any meetings with local officials.

CHECHNYA / TCHETCHENIE

03/11/04 – Chechen displaced persons under pressure to return - RFE/RL

Over the past two months, Russian officials in Moscow, Grozny and the Ingushetian capital Magas have issued conflicting and contradictory statements about the status of the tent camps in Ingushetia that at the turn of the year still housed an estimated 4,000-7,000 displaced persons from Chechnya. Despite repeated official reassurances that none of those displaced persons will be constrained to return to Chechnya against their will, one of the three camps in Ingushetia has already been closed, and the remaining two could also be shut down by the end of this month. The impetus for expediting the return from Ingushetia to Chechnya of the displaced Chechens currently housed in tent camps appears to have come from the pro-Moscow Chechen government, which argues that the apparently voluntary return of the displaced persons attests to the "normalization" of living conditions in Chechnya. (...) A senior UN official who visited Chechnya and Ingushetia in late January subsequently said he considered the 1 March deadline for closing the tent camps in Ingushetia unrealistic. Jan Egeland, who is UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, told Reuters on 27 January that there is not enough accommodation available in Chechnya to house all the Chechens from the camps in Ingushetia. He added that the security situation in Chechnya is "still very difficult." Two days later, on 29 January, Egeland announced that the Russian authorities had rescinded the 1 March deadline. He said he pointed out to the Russian authorities that to impose such a deadline while insisting that the repatriation process will be purely voluntary is a contradiction in terms. (...)

03/12/04 – Former Chechen Defense Minister says he surrendered voluntarily - RFE/RL

Speaking at a press conference in Grozny on 11 March, Magomed

Khambiev, who served as defense minister under Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, denied that he surrendered on 8 March because his relatives had been detained by Chechen security officials, Russian media reported. Khambiev said both he and Maskhadov were against the incursion into Daghestan in the summer of 1999 by Chechen formations commanded by field commander Shamil Basaev, and that he does not understand why Maskhadov failed to prevent Basaev from launching that raid. Khambiev also said he thinks Maskhadov should follow his example and surrender to the pro-Moscow Chechen authorities. He said he is ready to pledge his loyalty to pro-Moscow Chechen leader Akhmed- hadji Kadyrov and to help "achieve peace and stability" in Chechnya.

03/17/04 – Chechen leader names new prime Minister - RFE/RL

As widely anticipated, pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov fired Prime Minister Anatolii Popov on 16 March and appointed Sergei Abramov to succeed him, Russian media reported. Abramov, who is 32 and an ethnic Russian, served as Chechen finance minister from early 2001 until early 2003, when he was named to head the Russian Audit Chamber's permanent office in Chechnya. Audit Chamber Chairman and former Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin lauded Abramov's appointment. Kadyrov characterized his new prime minister as reliable and a skilled specialist. At the same time, (...)

03/18/04 – Chechen president thanks European Parliament - RFE/RL

In a statement dated 18 March and circulated by chechenpress.com, Aslan Maskhadov, who was elected Chechen president in January 1997 in a ballot recognized by both Russia and the international community, expressed his gratitude to the European Parliament for its adoption on 26 February of a declaration formally condemning as an act of genocide the 1944 deportation on orders from Soviet leader Josef Stalin of the entire Chechen people to Central Asia.

Maskhadov expressed the hope that the European Parliament will follow up by adopting a similar statement condemning the ongoing war in Chechnya as genocide. He warned that the indifference of much of the international community to Russia's systematic annihilation of the Chechens is impelling thousands of young men to join the ranks of the Chechen resistance, and that some of those volunteers "believe they have the moral right to use against the enemy the methods he uses [against us, but] which we condemn."

03/30/04 – Chechen field commander says Russian orthodox church a legitimate target - RFE/RL

In a statement summarized by chechenpress.com on 29 March, field commander Shamil Basaev said he believes the Chechen resistance has the legitimate right to respond to Russian aggression using almost any means except bacteriological or nuclear weapons. He said his men are capable of striking against Russian nationals in practically any country, but will not target Russians outside the Russian Federation. Basaev said that within Russia, he will not target mosques, synagogues, monasteries, kindergartens, orphanages, or psychiatric hospitals. However, he reserved the right to attack Russian Orthodox churches, claiming that the church leadership is overwhelmingly composed of agents of the Federal Security Service and Russian Military Intelligence, both of which are, according to Basaev, agencies that "actively participate in the genocide of the Chechen people."

04/15/04 – Russian foreign Minister criticizes EU resolution on Chechnya - RFE/RL

Lavrov told journalists in Dublin on 14 April that he believes the resolution the EU submitted last week to the UN Human Rights Commission criticizing the actions of federal troops in Chechnya does not accurately reflect the situation there, ITAR-TASS reported. Lavrov pointed out that Chechen resistance is petering out as "ever more people come to understand the terrorists are fighting a losing

battle." Human Rights Watch acting Director Rachel Denber has urged the UN commission to adopt the EU resolution in order to help "break the ongoing cycle of abuse and impunity" by Russian troops who, according to a statement summarized by Interfax on 13 April, routinely abduct, abuse, torture, rape, and execute Chechen civilians.

04/15/04 – UN commission rejects EU criticism of Russian violations in Chechnya - RFE/RL

The UN Commission for Human Rights failed on 15 April by a vote of 12 in favor and 23 against, with 18 abstentions, to endorse a resolution drafted by the EU calling on the Russian leadership to take more resolute action to halt reprisals by Russian forces in Chechnya against the civilian population, Russian media and "The Independent" reported on 15 and 16 April, respectively. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov lauded the outcome of the vote, saying that it "proves once again that the world community supports the decisive measures taken by Russia to restore law and order in Chechnya and to fight terrorism," ITAR-TASS reported. (...)

04/21/04 – Former Chechen Defense Minister sheds light on causes of war - RFE/RL

In an extensive interview published in "Kommersant-Vlast," No. 15, Magomed Khambiev, who served for several years as Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's defense minister before surrendering to the current pro-Moscow Chechen authorities last month under circumstances that remain unclear, shed light on the events that precipitated the resumption of hostilities in Chechnya in 1999. Khambiev claimed that renegade Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev launched his attack on Daghestan in August 1999 in defiance of Maskhadov, who sought to avoid a new war with Russia. He said Maskhadov asked without success for help, including weapons, from Moscow, Georgia, and from the neighboring North Caucasus republics of Ingushetia and Daghestan, but that Basaev had more funds at his disposal, some of

which he received from oligarch Boris Berezovskii and from Aleksandr Voloshin, at that time head of the Russian presidential administration and a member of the Security Council. Khambiev said that Maskhadov also asked Ingushetia's then-President Ruslan Aushev to convene a conference of presidents of North Caucasus republics to discuss the Basaev threat. Khambiev said that Aushev can confirm that "Maskhadov wanted to say: 'If what is required is to capture Basaev, or destroy him, whatever you want, we will do it, just don't send troops into Chechnya.' If someone had said, 'Get rid of Basaev and there will not be a war,' Maskhadov would have fulfilled that condition."

05/06/04 – Are pro-Moscow forces closing in on Chechen President ? - RFE/RL

Over the past several days, members of the pro-Moscow Chechen leadership have repeatedly claimed that a large band of Chechen fighters, possibly including Aslan Maskhadov, who was elected Chechen president in 1997, was routed during a major operation in Kurchaloi Raion southeast of Grozny on 2 May. Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Atsaev told Interfax on 5 May that more than 200 Chechen police are still engaged in a hunt in the Kurchaloi, Gudermes, and Nozhai-Yurt districts for a band of 30 Chechen fighters who launched an abortive attack on 1 May on a checkpoint in Alleroi, east of Gudermes, manned jointly by Chechen police and members of pro-Moscow Chechen leader Akhmad-hadji Kadyrov's security service. Other militants from Daghestan are reported to have participated in that attack. Kadyrov's son Ramzan, who heads his father's security service, said on 3 May that eight Chechen fighters were killed during or after the 1 May attack. A spokesman for Kadyrov's security service, Artur Akhmadov, told Interfax on 5 May that he believes the 1 May attack was led by Akhmed Avtorkhanov, who heads Maskhadov's personal security detachment. Also on 5 May, Ramzan Kadyrov said he believes Avtorkhanov has been badly wounded and is hiding out in a village in Gudermes Raion. Akhmadov said on 4 May and again

on 5 May that he has received intelligence reports that Maskhadov is also in the area currently being searched.

Ekho Moskv, "Kommersant-Daily," RIA-Novosti, and other Russian media have reported over the last week that the authorities have stepped up their efforts to capture Maskhadov in connection with President Putin's 7 May inauguration.

05/10/04 – Pro-Moscow Chechen leader killed by bomb - RFE/RL

Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov was one of six people killed on 9 May by a bomb blast at a Grozny stadium during celebrations to mark Victory Day, the anniversary of the end in 1945 of World War II. Khussein Isaev, the chairman of Chechnya's interim legislature, also died, as did a Chechen journalist working for Reuters and two of Kadyrov's bodyguards. Colonel General Valerii Baranov, commander of the joint federal forces in Chechnya, was severely injured. The 40 people injured in the explosion included many members of the Chechen leadership, among them Prime Minister Sergei Abramov, whom President Vladimir Putin named later on 9 May to serve as Chechen leader pending new elections. Meeting with Kadyrov's son Ramzan, Putin praised the former mufti, whom he named as interim leader four years ago, as "a real hero" who tried to protect his republic and people and restore peace, Interfax reported. Putin also told Radio Mayak that terrorists and "those we are fighting today" face inevitable retribution. Kadyrov, who was born in 1951 in Kazakhstan and aligned himself with the Chechen resistance during the 1994-96 war, had survived a dozen earlier assassination attempts.

05/11/04 – Slain Chechen leader son's is promoted - RFE/RL

Chechen Prime Minister Sergei Abramov, who in accordance with the Chechen Constitution has been named acting head of the republic pending new elections, on 10 May named Kadyrov's youngest son Ramzan first deputy prime minister, Interfax reported. That move has triggered media speculation that the Russian leadership may consider Ramzan Kadyrov a potential

candidate to succeed his father. But Chechen Security Council Secretary Rudnik Dudaev told Interfax on 10 May that the elections for a new republican head will take place strictly in accordance with the Chechen Constitution, implying that no exception will be made for Ramzan, who is 27, to Article 66 of the constitution, which sets the minimum age for presidential candidates at 30.

Dudaev added that the Chechen government and State Council fully control the political situation in the republic, while federal troops and the police are in charge of the military situation. Dudaev also rejected as inappropriate proposals by "some so-called experts" to impose direct presidential rule in Chechnya, Interfax reported. He said doing so would throw the republic back several years.

05/17/04 – Radical field commander claims responsibility for Chechen leader's death - RFE/RL

In a statement posted on his website (<http://www.kavkazcenter.com>), Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev claimed that his fighters were responsible for the bomb explosion at the Dynamo stadium in Grozny on 9 May that killed pro-Moscow Chechen leader Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov and interim parliament Chairman Khussein Isaev, Reuters reported on 17 May. Basaev branded both men "traitors." On 14 May, Chechen Security Council Secretary Rudnik Dudaev and Interior Ministry spokesman Ruslan Atsaev both denied Russian media reports that a construction worker has been detained on suspicion of planting the bomb during construction work at the stadium, ITAR-TASS reported.

05/21/04 – Top Chechen official again says constitution must be observed - RFE/RL

Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov told Interfax on 20 May that the provisions of the Chechen Constitution must be strictly observed. "If we give way to temptation and violate the constitution even once, [doing so] will become systematic and the

fundamental law will become a meaningless document," he argued. Chechen ministers and clergy last week appealed to President Putin to waive the constitutional requirement that candidates for the post of Chechen leader be at least 30 years old in order to permit Ramzan Kadyrov, who is 27, to contest the ballot for a successor to his father, Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, who was killed by a bomb in Grozny on 9 May. Ramzan Kadyrov stressed that his late father regarded the adoption of the constitution as his most notable achievement. Asked to comment on media reports that he backs Chechen Interior Minister Major General Alu Alkhanov for the post of republican head, Kadyrov noted that Alkhanov "is an experienced general" who enjoys the support of thousands of Chechen law-enforcement officials.

05/24/04 – Chechen election date set - RFE/RL

The elections for a successor to pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, who was killed by a bomb in Grozny on 9 May, will take place on 29 August, Russian media reported on 21 May, citing Russian Central Election Commission Chairman Aleksandr Veshnyakov. Earlier reports indicated that the ballot would take place on 5 September, the latest date permitted by the Russian Constitution. ITAR-TASS on 23 May quoted Chechen Central Election Commission Chairman Abdul-Kerim Arsakhanov as saying that the election campaign will begin on 25 May, and that candidates must submit to that commission by 14 July the relevant documentation, including the signatures of 6,000 voters in their support or a 4.5 million-ruble (\$150,000) deposit. Arsakhanov said no changes will be made to the existing election legislation.

05/27/04 – Candidates in no rush to register for Chechen ballot - RFE/RL

As of 26 May, only one candidate had expressed a firm interest in registering to contest the 29 August election for a successor to pro-Moscow Chechen leader Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, Interfax reported. That candidate is Mariyat

Gorchkhanova, a civil servant from Urus-Martan Raion. Khalit Tagiev, an unemployed man from Grozny who announced on 25 May that he planned to run in the election, changed his mind on 26 May after ascertaining that candidates would not have access to budget funds for their campaigns, Interfax reported. In an interview published in "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 26 May, Abdul-Kerim Arsakhanov, chairman of Chechnya's Central Election Commission, predicted that "there will not be a dearth" of candidates. On 25 May, Interfax quoted Arsakhanov's deputy, Buvaisari Arsakhanov, as predicting that some 15 candidates will register, of whom five have a reasonable chance of being elected. On 26 May, Aslanbek Aslakhanov, who pulled out of last October's Chechen presidential ballot to accept a post as an aide to President Putin, announced that he will not contest the election, Russian media reported. Aslakhanov added, however, that he is ready to help organize the election if requested to do so.

***INGUSHETIA /
INGOUCHIE***

03/08/04 – Putin proposes talks on Prigorodnyiraion - RFE/RL

Meeting in Moscow on 4 March with North Ossetia's President Aleksandr Dzasokhov, President Putin proposed three-way talks with Ingushetia's President Murat Zyazikov on expediting the return to their homes in North Ossetia's disputed Prigorodnyi Raion of ethnic Ingush forced to flee amid interethnic violence in the fall of 1992, Interfax reported. Putin thanked Dzasokhov for what he termed his "positive steps and efforts" to improve relations with Ingushetia.

04/04/04 – Displaced persons camps in Ingushetia to close - RFE/RL

Igor Yunash, first deputy head of the Interior Ministry's Federal Migration Service, said on 30 March that the two remaining camps in Ingushetia for displaced persons

who fled the war in neighboring Chechnya could be closed by the end of April, providing housing is built in Chechnya for their inhabitants, Interfax reported on 31 March. He said the Satsita camp, which houses some 450 families, could be closed by 1 April, and the Sputnik camp, which houses 119 families, by 30 April. He added that those displaced persons who do not wish to return to Chechnya should be offered alternative accommodation in Ingushetia.

Ingushetia's President Murat Zyazikov denied on 29 March that Chechen fugitives are being pressured to leave Ingushetia, Interfax reported. But Chechen government official Mompash Machuev told Interfax on 26 March that only those displaced persons who returned from Ingushetia to Chechnya before 31 March would be eligible for financial compensation of 1,000 rubles (\$35) each.

04/04/04 – Pro-Kremlin Ingush leader survives assassination attempt - RFE/RL

Ingush President Murat Zyazikov narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in Nazran on 6 April, Russian and international media reported. An automobile containing an estimated 30 to 60 kilograms of explosives pulled up next to Zyazikov's armored limousine at approximately 9:30 a.m., local time, and exploded less than a meter from Zyazikov, newsru.com reported on 7 April.

Investigators have not yet established whether the attack involved one or two suicide bombers. Zyazikov escaped with minor injuries and returned to work later that day, but four security guards and two bystanders were injured in the incident. Zyazikov, a former Federal Security Service (FSB) general, is a staunch supporter of President Vladimir Putin. He was elected president of Ingushetia in 2002 with massive Kremlin support, which was aimed at preventing the election of a candidate supported by former Ingush President Ruslan Aushev. Aushev was known for his ties to Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and had frequently called for negotiations to resolve the Chechen crisis.

04/22/04 – Pressure on Ingushetian President mounts - RFE/RL

Ingushetian parliament Deputy Musa Ozdoev has formally signaled his opposition to President Murat Zyazikov by publishing an article detailing the falsification of the results of the voting in Ingushetia in the 7 December Russian State Duma elections, ingushetiya.ru reported on 21 April. According to the official returns, the pro-Kremlin Unified Russia garnered 57 percent of the party-list vote. Ozdoev, together with Zyazikov's cousin Musa Zyazikov, who failed in his bid to win election to the Duma from Ingushetia's sole single-mandate district, has demanded that President Zyazikov admit to the falsification and have the election outcome annulled.

04/23/04 – Ingush oppositionist appeals to Putin - RFE/RL

Musa Ozdoev, the author of an article detailing how the Russian State Duma election outcome was falsified in Ingushetia, addressed an open letter to President Putin on 22 April warning him that the situation in Ingushetia is "explosive," ingushetiya.ru reported the following day. Ozdoev enumerated his criticisms of Murat Zyazikov's actions since Zyazikov's election two years ago as president of Ingushetia. Ozdoev said the falsification of the outcome of the 7 December State Duma elections served to compound popular disenchantment, which was reflected in the unprecedented low turnout (between 5-10 percent) in the Russian presidential ballot on 14 March and a recent wave of protest demonstrations. Official data gave turnout as 98.2 percent of registered voters.

Ozdoev appealed to Putin to create a special commission to investigate the situation in Ingushetia.

05/14/04 – Where is Ingushetia's President ? - RFE/RL

The ingushetiya.ru website drew attention on 14 May to the fact that President Murat Zyazikov left Ingushetia on 7 May. Moreover, unlike the heads of other neighboring North Caucasus republics, Zyazikov did not attend the funeral service in Grozny on 10

May for slain pro-Moscow Chechen leader Kadyrov, nor are any formal expressions of condolences to the victims of the 9 May Grozny bombing that killed Kadyrov and five others posted on the official Ingush government website. A source within Zyazikov's administration told ingushetiya.ru, which is believed to be controlled by Zyazikov's Moscow-based rivals, the brothers Mikheil and Khamzat Gutseriev, that Zyazikov is in Moscow.

05/26/04 – Ingush oppositionists appeal to Russian supreme court - RFE/RL

Ingush parliamentarian Musa Ozdoev, together with candidates from Ingushetia who failed to win election to the Russian State Duma in December, have appealed to the Russian Supreme Court the rejection by the Supreme Court of Ingushetia of their suit claiming that the republic's leadership and Central Election Commission violated numerous articles of the election law, ingushetiya.ru reported on 16 May. Specifically, Ozdoev claimed that members of the clergy campaigned on behalf of the candidates supported by the Ingush leadership; that the election commission included relatives of those candidates; that voter lists were falsified to include deceased individuals; and that protocols from several constituencies were falsified. Ozdoev publicized details of the falsification last month and wrote to President Putin asking him to form a commission to investigate the situation that has developed in Ingushetia since Murat Zyazikov's election as president two years ago. On 15 May, ITAR-TASS reported that Zyazikov, who left Ingushetia one week earlier, met in Kislovodsk with presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District Vladimir Yakovlev and with Aleksandr Dzasokhov, president of the Republic of North Ossetia.

DAGHESTAN / DAGHESTAN

03/08/04 – District administrator assassinated in Daghestan - RFE/RL

Magomedrasul Akhlyae, the head of Daghestan's northern Buynaksk Raion, was killed in a drive-by shooting on 4 March. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 5 March. Gadji Makhachev, who represents Daghestan in the State Duma, commented that such killings have become routine because Moscow is indifferent to the fact that laws are routinely ignored in Daghestan. Daghestani Nationalities Minister Magomedsalikh Gusaev was killed by a car bomb in August, and Kyzyl'yurt Raion head Abdurakhman Gadjev was shot and seriously wounded in September.

03/11/04 – MSF implicates Russian authorities in staffer's abduction - RFE/RL

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) President Jean-Herve Bredol told AFP on 10 March that influential Russian and Daghestan government officials are implicated in the August 2002 abduction in Daghestan of MSF aid worker Arjan Erkel. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 11 March. Bredol added that negotiations on obtaining Erkel's release were broken off in December when the intermediaries opted out. He said MSF will try to increase international pressure on the Russian authorities to free Erkel. Deputy presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District Said-Selim Peshkhoev told Interfax later on 10 March that Bredol's accusations are totally without foundation. Peshkhoev asked rhetorically why, if MSF has information that could be useful to those investigating Erkel's disappearance, the organization has not made that information available.

04/13/04 – Abducted aid worker released in Daghestan - RFE/RL

Arjan Erkel, a Dutch staffer of Doctors Without Borders who was abducted in Makhachkala in August 2002, was rescued early on 11 April in a joint operation by the Daghestan branch of the FSB and

Daghestan's Interior Ministry, Russian agencies reported. He flew to Moscow the same day before going on to the Netherlands. (...)

04/22/04 – Duma Deputy foresees political crisis in Daghestan - RFE/RL

Russian State Duma deputy Gadzhi Makhachev (Unified Russia) warned in a commentary published in "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 5 April that the Russian leadership's apparent indifference to the ongoing wave of murders and terrorist acts in Daghestan could culminate in civil strife and bloodshed. Not a single one of the high-profile killings of senior officials in recent years has been solved, Makhachev noted. Makhachev was himself injured in a botched assassination attempt last year in Makhachkala, the capital of Daghestan.

Makhachev blamed the deterioration of the situation in Daghestan on "guerrillas and Wahhabis who recently fought in Chechnya," and who subsequently "shaved off their beards" and made their way across the border into Daghestan. "Today there are hundreds of people living in Daghestan who fought in Chechnya and do not know how to do anything except kill and use a gun," he said. (...)

KRASNODAR KRASNODAR

03/10/04 – Police identifies cemetery vandals - ArmenPress

The weekly Yerkramas, published by the Armenian community in the southern Russian province of Krasnodar, said the local police have identified a group of youngsters, who profaned Armenian gravestones at the Slavonic cemetery of the city on March 2 overnight. The weekly said the group was made of 8 youngsters, aged between 13 to 16. The local police said their parents will have to compensate the damages and restore the broken tombs. A similar act of vandalism was reported in 2002 April that was strongly condemned by Armenian government and leading politicians, who voiced their serious concern

over escalating ethnic tensions in the southern Russia. On April 18, 2002 about 50 youths went on a rampage through the Armenian cemetery in the city of Krasnodar vandalizing gravestones and monuments. Though the local police announced then the arrest of three Russian youngsters, aged between 14 and 17, on suspicion of involvement in the rampage, all of them avoided any punishment.

04/09/04 – 15 Armenians are deported from Krasnodar - AZG Armenian Daily

Fifteen Armenian were deported from Russian Krasnodar southern city April 7.

According to Russian mass media, all the deportees were living in Krasnodar illegally, and worked as waiters or sold goods at local food market.

The Krasnodar-Yerevan flight tickets' price for all the Armenian citizens, 3,000 Russian rubles, was paid by the local government. The Russian media reports that similar deportations are scheduled in future as well.