

Covcas Bulletin

Conflits et Droits de l'Homme au Caucase
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p 3-8 Azerbaijan Azerbaïdjan	<p>A bill on alternative military service was presented by the ARF Dashnaksutiun party, member of the coalition in power, and was adopted by the Parliament in the first reading by a majority of 90 votes to 2. Considered to be a measure that puts Armenia in conformity with its commitments to the Council of Europe, the bill includes restrictions in its application, however, that are contested by European experts. Indeed, only a limited number of citizens can take advantage of it, applying to members of certain identified religious groups that forbid their followers to carry firearms. Moreover, it stipulates 42 months of alternative service instead of the compulsory 24 months of normal military service. Likewise, it does not allow for the transformation of military service to alternative service in cases where the conscript has completed half of his service under normal conditions. The stated reasons for these restrictions are essentially linked to the war-related conditions in effect in the country: soldiers in obligatory military service regularly endanger their lives, and they are on active duty 16 hours per day as opposed to 8 hours for conscripts in alternative service.</p> <p>The aggression last September 27 against the editor of the newspaper Or ("Day"), Gayané Mukoyan,</p>	
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arrested, three of whom were condemned to life imprisonment. Ilham Aliev won the presidential election of October 15, 2003. The heir of the autocrat president Heidar Aliev, who reigned during three decades over the country, was elected following a vote widely contested by international observers for massive violations before, during and after the vote.

The turnout at the polls was 71% of the 4.4 million voters registered on the electoral lists.

OSCE experts cited violence against members of the opposition, obstacles to demonstrations organized by the opposition, police tolerance toward the violence practiced against the opposition, and finally widespread use of the media and government resources for the promotion of candidate Ilham Aliev.

Reporters without Borders denounced the violent attacks by the security forces against more than 25 Azeri and foreign journalists during opposition demonstrations.

With regard to the elections, the preliminary declaration of Peter Eicher, the chief of the OSCE observation mission, was criticized by a group of 188 observers from central and eastern Europe. In its separate declaration, this group judged the OSCE remarks too weak, stating that the remarks did not reflect the widespread fraud reported by the 600 observers of the mission.

RESUMES

ARMENIE

Le Parlement adopte une loi sur le service militaire alternatif . Une journaliste attaquée-

Une loi sur le service militaire alternatif a été présentée à l'initiative du parti FRA Dashnaksutiun membre de la coalition au pouvoir, et adoptée en première lecture par le Parlement à une majorité de 90 voix contre 2. Considérée comme une mesure qui met l'Arménie en conformité avec ses engagements auprès du

Conseil de l'Europe, les restrictions de son application sont cependant contestées par les experts européens. En effet, seul un nombre restreint de citoyens peut en bénéficier ; elle s'applique aux membres de certains groupes religieux identifiés qui interdisent le port des armes à leurs adhérents. De plus, elle prévoit une durée de 42 mois de service alternatif au lieu des 24 mois réglementaires prévus pour le service militaire normal ; de même, elle ne n'envisage pas la transformation du service militaire en service alternatif lorsque le conscrit en a effectué la moitié dans des conditions normales. Les raisons invoquées pour ces restrictions sont essentiellement liées aux conditions de guerre en vigueur dans le pays : les soldats en service militaire obligatoire mettent régulièrement leur vie en danger, et ils sont de service 16 heures par jour contre 8 heures pour les conscrits en service alternatif.

L'agression contre la rédactrice en chef du journal Or (le Jour), Gayané Mukoyan, le 27 septembre dernier, a soulevé l'indignation de ses collègues journalistes, qui ont encore une fois dénoncé l'atmosphère d'impunité créée en Arménie par les autorités passées et présentes du pays. Les journalistes arméniens affirment que presque tous les rédacteurs des journaux principaux d'Arménie auraient fait l'objet d'agressions, sans qu'aucun des agresseurs ne soit inquiété à ce jour.

Enfin une enquête de « Transparence Internationale » sur la corruption dans le monde place l'Arménie au 78^{ème} rang dans une liste de 133 pays, ses deux voisins de la Transcaucasie, l'Azerbaïdjan et la Géorgie étant classés dans les dix pays les plus corrompus du monde.

AZERBAÏDJAN

Les autorités reconnaissent le caractère séparatiste des troubles du Nord-Ouest. Fraudes massives aux élections présidentielles accompagnées de violences policières contre des opposants et des dizaines de journalistes.

Les régions Zaqatala et Balakan au Nord - Ouest de l'Azerbaïdjan ont été à nouveau le théâtre de heurts entre des groupes armés et les forces de l'ordre, mais cette fois, l'enquête de la police nomme clairement de groupes séparatistes avars là où les autorités azerbaïdjanaises ne voulaient voir jusqu'ici que des actes de banditisme. Les Avars, population vivant des deux côtés de la frontière de l'Azerbaïdjan avec le Daghestan, ont été particulièrement actifs depuis 2001 : leur chef, Hadji Mahomedov a été tué lors d'une altercation avec la police azerbaïdjanaise il y a un an ; trente personnes des groupes rebelles ont été arrêtées, dont trois condamnées à la prison à vie.

L'élection présidentielle du 15 octobre 2003 a vu Ilham Aliev vainqueur du scrutin ; L'héritier du président autocrate Heidar Aliev qui a régné pendant trois décennies sur le pays, a été élu à la suite d'un scrutin largement contesté par les observateurs internationaux pour les violations massives avant, pendant et après le vote.

Le taux de participation a été de 71 % sur les 4,4 millions électeurs enregistrés sur les listes électorales.

Les experts de l'OSCE ont fait état de violences contre les membres de l'opposition, d'obstacles aux manifestations organisées par cette dernière, de bienveillance des forces de l'ordre face aux violences exercées à l'encontre de l'opposition, et enfin d'utilisation massive des médias et des ressources gouvernementales pour la promotion du candidat Ilham Aliev.

« Reporters sans Frontières » a dénoncé de violentes attaques par les forces de sécurité contre plus de 25 journalistes azéris et étrangers, lors des manifestations de l'opposition.

Sur le déroulement des élections, la déclaration préliminaire du chef de la mission d'observation de l'OSCE, Peter Eicher, a été critiquée par un groupe de 188 observateurs de l'Europe centrale et orientale. Dans une déclaration séparée, ce groupe, jugeant les propos de l'OSCE trop faible, a considéré que ceux-ci ne reflètent pas l'ampleur des fraudes rapportées par les 600 observateurs de la mission.

**DEVELOPPING EVENTS /
REVUE DE PRESSE**
**AZERBAIJAN /
AZERBAIDJAN**
**09/24/03 – Tensions again rising
in northwestern Azerbaijan –
RFE/RL**

The situation in the northwestern Zaqatala and Balakan areas of Azerbaijan has deteriorated recently, primarily due to the activities of armed gangs. A series of attacks on police as well as on civilians in the region has given birth to suspicion that these actions are of a deliberate nature. The situation in this region deteriorated once before, in the summer of 2001. Then from June to September 2001, members of an illegal armed grouping led by Haji Magomedov conducted armed strikes on police posts and patrol stations in Zaqatala and Balakan. During this period, the gangs killed 4 policemen and 2 civilian inhabitants, and also injured 10 law enforcement officers. In the summer of 2002, a series of armed attacks on divisions of the interior ministry forces and police departments in the same regions also occurred. As a result of these attacks, one officer was killed and 6 policemen were injured. As a result of operations carried out last year, law enforcement bodies detained and initiated criminal proceedings against 23 criminals. Murder and robbery were only a part of the crimes they were accused.

According to the induction, the basic purpose of the terrorists was the creation of a separatist Dzhar-Balaken republic on the territory of Azerbaijan. Acts of vandalism, such as the blowing up of the bust of sheikh Shamil in the regional center Zaqatala (400 km northwest of Baku) seemed to be intended to arouse interethnic tensions in this region with large Dagestani, especially Avar population. Moreover, the murders of both civilians and representatives of law enforcement bodies seemed to contain a political purpose.

About 30 members of the group have been arrested to date, three of

which were sentenced to life in prison. Yet despite these measures, many criminals are still free. The head of the illegal armed group, Haji Magomedov, was killed last year during an exchange of fire with border guards.

The most recent series of events began on the night of August 14, 2003, when a group of armed people took seven people hostage in a mountainous part of the Balakan area (450 km northwest of Baku). Later six hostages, all inhabitants of the Zaqatala area, were released, while kidnappers demanded a ransom of \$20,000 for the last hostage, an inhabitant of the Gabal village of the Lagodekhi area of Georgia.

However, law enforcement bodies freed the last hostage. No data was given on the identity of the perpetrators. However, this immediately raised fears that this was carried out by members of the armed group that killed several people in 2001-2002.(...)

**09/30/03 – “islamists” sentenced
in Azerbaijan - RFE/RL Newline**

Azerbaijan's Court for Military Felonies handed down prison terms of three and four years on 29 September to two residents of the city of Gyanja convicted of plotting a coup d'etat, Turan and zerkalo.az reported on 29 and 30 September respectively. The two men, both members of the congregation of Gyanja's Djuma mosque, were also found guilty of disseminating religious propaganda and of seeking to recruit an armed band of some 400-500 young men. One of the two men, Rasim Abbasov, told the court last month that his preliminary testimony was extracted under threat of torture

**09/30/03 – Former Azerbaijani
President slams “dirty” election
campaign - RFE/RL Newline**

In a 29 September interview with Turan, former President Ayaz Mutalibov characterized the ongoing presidential-election campaign as "amoral, dirty, and dissolute." He said the authorities and the state-controlled media are "slinging mud" at opposition presidential candidates. He added that police reprisals on 21 September against supporters of opposition candidates in Baku, Lenkoran, and Masally (...)

show that "the authorities are unable to hold democratic elections," and are preparing to falsify the outcome of the 15 October ballot. The Central Election Commission rejected an application by Mutalibov, who fled Baku in May 1992 following an abortive comeback attempt and has since lived in Moscow, to register as a presidential candidate.

**10/01/03 – U.S Ambassador to
Azerbaijan condemns attack on
human rights activists - RFE/RL
Newline**

During a 30 September meeting with human rights activists in Baku, Reno Harnish condemned a 27 September attack on the Nakhichevan Human Rights Center and the neighboring office of the independent newspaper "Our Nakhichevan," and a similar attack on three human rights activists the following day at Nakhichevan airport, Turan reported on 30 September.

**10/02/03 - Ailing leader of
Azerbaijan won't seek re-election,
clearing stage for son - The
Associated Press**

Azerbaijan's ailing leader Geidar Aliev on Thursday announced his withdrawal from the presidential election, passing the ruling party's mantle to his son in what could result in the first family succession in a former Soviet republic.

Opposition politicians and independent analysts have long predicted that Aliev, 80, would attempt to install his son, Ilham, as president.

However, the presidential administration previously denied such plans - even as Aliev laid the ground for a transfer of power by pushing through constitutional changes, appointing his son prime minister and seeing to it that Ilham Aliev was registered as a candidate in the Oct. 15 election.

Geidar Aliev, meanwhile, has not been seen in public since he was hospitalized July 8.(...)

Ilham Aliev already was on the ballot as a presidential candidate but has said repeatedly he

registered simply to help his father's campaign.

The Azerbaijani opposition, which long has speculated that Geidar Aliev is in fact dead or incapacitated, said his withdrawal bodes well for its own chances in the election.

Isa Gambar, a presidential candidate and the leader of the main opposition party Musavat, called the withdrawal "a recognition by the ruling regime that the era of Aliev has ended."

"This will lead to the victory of democratic forces at the upcoming election," he said.

Speculation about a transfer of power intensified when Geidar Aliev collapsed while giving a televised speech in April and was hospitalized for 11 days, some of it in intensive care.

Geidar Aliev returned to work, but in July he was hospitalized again for heart problems, first in Turkey and then in the prestigious Cleveland Clinic in the United States. (...)

Ilham Aliev, 41, who before his August appointment as prime minister served as first vice president of the state oil company and a member of parliament, speaks English, French and Turkish. He is highly regarded in the West, and President Bush took the unusual step of sending him a letter of congratulations when he was appointed prime minister. In an August interview with The Associated Press, the younger Aliev said he was committed to moving the country forward on democratic reforms. "It will be naive to expect a country only 11 years old, who suffered occupation, civil war, several attempts at coup d'etat, (with) still hostile groups inside the country and outside the country ... (to achieve) the same level of democratic development like you have in Western Europe," he said. "But the important thing is we are moving in that direction."

10/03/03 – Lawyer barred from visiting Azerbaijani political prisoner - RFE/RL Newline

Former Interior Minister Iskander Hamidov, who was sentenced three months ago in a retrial to 11 years' imprisonment on charges of embezzlement and abuse of power (...), was refused a visit from his lawyer on 2 October, (...). Hamidov, who was refused registration to

contest the 15 October presidential election, appealed to his supporters on 26 September to vote for opposition Musavat Party Chairman Isa Gambar.

10/06/03 –opposition candidates subjected to further harassment - RFE/RL Newline

Police and YAP supporters attacked opposition presidential candidates Isa Gambar (Musavat Party) and Sabir Rustamkhanli (Civic Solidarity Party) on 3 October as they campaigned in Devichi and Ali-Bairamli, respectively, Turan reported. Several people were injured in the Devichi fighting. On 4 October, police bearing shields, helmets, and truncheons tried to bar access to a square in the district center of Masally where Gambar was scheduled to hold campaign rally. Trucks blocked access to the venue in nearby Lenkoran where Gambar had scheduled a second meeting with voters. In Gyanja, Azerbaijan's second-largest city, more than 10,000 people attended a campaign rally on 4 October for opposition Azerbaijan National Independence Party Chairman Etibar Mamedov, despite attempts by men in civilian clothes to pressure people not to attend, Turan reported.

10/07/03 – Rumors intensify of impending arrests in Azerbaijan... And of mass falsification- RFE/RL Newline

Turan reported on 6 October without disclosing its sources that approximately one week before the 15 October presidential ballot the Azerbaijani authorities plan to arrest on trumped-up charges "numerous" opposition party activists who plan to monitor the voting and register possible instances of falsification. Those activists will be held in custody until after the ballot, the agency predicted.

Opposition Musavat Party Chairman and presidential candidate Isa Gambar told journalists in Baku on 6 October that the authorities plan to rig the 15 October presidential election, zerkalo.az reported on 7 October. "We do not suspect, we know that the authorities are preparing to falsify [the ballot]," Gambar said. "These are anti-constitutional

intentions. These are criminal acts." Meanwhile state-sector employees - including those in the transport, education, energy, medical and other sectors -- have reportedly been informed that on the eve of the election they will be given ballot papers marked in favor of Prime Minister Ilham Aliev. Those personnel were instructed that they should put those allot papers in the ballot box and return to their employer the blank ballot paper given to them at their local polling station, Turan reported on 7 October.

10/09/03 - "Azerbaijan May Need Alternative Military Service Only After Release of Occupied Territories" All Caucasus Sheik - ANS Baku Today

All Caucasus Sheik Haji Allahshukur Pashazadeh is against of adoption of Law on Alternative Military Service.

He thinks it unnessesary to speak of alternative service while 20 per cent of territory of Azerbaijan remains under occupation. As shiek-ul islam I don't understand the form. Every Azerbaijani having love to motherland and a patriot should avoid even having a word of it.

It would be cowardness to deprive a naion of taking arm to release occupied territories. All Caucasus Sheik said alternative military service can't be put down to Islamic religion. Allahshukur Pashazadeh said 'To release land from occupation is right work In Islam', and added relevant state bodies must prevent this law. In Islam it is duty of a person to defend his motherland. Everybody being able to take arm must defend motherland. Today we need to think how to settle Karabakh conflict and recover occupied land of Azerbaijan. All Cucasus Sheik said Azerbaijani government can reconsider the law after settlement of Daqliq Qarabaq conflict and restoration of peace in the region.

10/09/03 - Council of Europe and OSCE Media Watchdog voice concern about media in Azerbaijan- Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and Freimut Duve, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, today

made the following joint statement regarding the media situation in Azerbaijan

«We are deeply concerned by the continuous reports regarding harassment of the media and intimidation of journalists in Azerbaijan.

We are in particular alarmed by the fate of the newspaper Yeni Musavat, which has been sentenced to three fines amounting in total to 100,000 US Dollars and whose bank account has been frozen. Without commenting on the substance of the law suits, it seems clear that such a high fine is disproportionate and might undermine the financial viability of this newspaper. We are all the more worried that this may discourage critical reporting at a time when media pluralism and the full and unhindered exercise of press freedoms will be essential in the run up to the forthcoming presidential elections.

We trust that the Azerbaijani authorities will take all necessary steps in order to ensure that such obstruction does not take place in Azerbaijan and to guarantee respect for freedom of the media in accordance with the pertinent international standards, as enshrined in particular in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Azerbaijan is a Party.

We call on the Azerbaijani authorities to review the provisions concerning libel contained in the Azerbaijani Law in the light of the above standards taking all appropriate measures to align these provisions and their implementation with these standards.

We are also extremely concerned about the attack against several journalists outside the main Baku Police Station that took place on 8 September 2003. As a result, ten journalists have been injured. We expect the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of this assault against media representatives as soon as possible and to inform our respective organisations of its results, and we expect the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure that a free and open media landscape prevails in their country.»

10/14/03 - Experts Predict A State Of Emergency after the Presidential Election - RFE/RL

The Central Election Commission (CEC) has issued an appeal to law-enforcement bodies and the Public Prosecutor's Office, demanding that they launch an investigation into various illegal invocations voiced by the opposition media. According to the CEC members, opposition media outlets have been inciting the population towards rebellion and confrontation. Therefore, according to the CEC, law-enforcement bodies must exercise vigilance. According to local newspapers, using the commission's appeal as a basis, the government could declare a state of emergency in the country.

Not long ago Prosecutor General Zakir Garalov accused a number of presidential candidates of making anti-constitutional speeches. He warned that if such speeches were not stopped, his office would take severe measures within the framework of the law.(...)

But according to opposition representatives, it is the government which realizes it will lose the elections, that is in fact preparing for the coup. Mehman Javadoglu, the opposition Musavat deputy chairman for press issues, claimed that the government, which wants to create confusion among the population with such a statement, is making the ideological preparations for seizing power. Javadoglu did not rule out that the government would attempt to declare a state of emergency, adding that this would be futile.(...)

10/14/03 - Allegations of violence and vote-rigging as Azerbaijan's oil-rich dynasty faces polls - The Independent (UK)

(...)

Human Rights Watch said yesterday the elections could not be considered free and fair because of widespread abuse and bias towards government candidates. Peter Bouckaert, a spokesman, said: "Too much manipulation, too many arrests and too many beatings of opposition activists have taken place to consider the election process free and fair."

Thirty experts sent by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to

monitor the campaign have documented abuses including police harassment of opposition supporters, hindrance of candidates' rallies and massive use of state media and government resources to promote Ilham. The OSCE observers' interim report said: "Violence persists as police intervene against rallies or tolerate violence against the opposition. Unequal treatment of the opposition persists ... three candidates assert their lives have been threatened."

In a recent report, the Paris-based organisation Reporters Without Borders noted an increase in attacks against independent Azeri journalists trying to cover opposition activities. (...)

10/15/03 - Son of Azerbaijan president seeks to replace father amid violence, fraud claims in ex-Soviet republic - The Associated Press

Police and opposition supporters clashed Wednesday as authorities counted ballots in an election widely expected to result in a transfer of power from father to son in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan.

Ilham Aliev, the son of the ailing incumbent president, was far ahead in the first few districts counted so far, figures at the Election Commission showed soon after polls closed.(...)

More than 71 percent of the 4.4 million registered voters had cast ballots, the Central Election Commission said. The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan party secretary claimed Ilham Aliev had enough votes to win, but Musavat said exit polls showed its candidate won. The first results from the election commission were not expected until after midnight.(...)

10/16/03 - Monitors register unprecedented level of violations - RFE/RL Newsline

Local and international election observers registered widespread flagrant violations of election legislation during the 15 October ballot. Musavat Party Deputy Chairman Vurgun Eyyub told journalists that the most serious shortcoming was the apparently deliberate omission from voter lists of thousands of opposition

sympathizers, Turan reported. He said some 3,150 people appealed to courts in five Baku districts to be reinstated in voter registers, but judges were unable to reinstate all of them. Turan also quoted an unofficial source that estimated the number of people excluded in the tens of thousands. In addition, some opposition observers reported being evicted from polling stations, while others reportedly saw wads of ballots marked in favor of Prime Minister Aliiev being stuffed into ballot boxes. The CEC rejected on 15 October a demand by its five opposition representatives to discuss procedural violations, Turan reported.

10/17/03 - OSCE observing mission head beaten in Baku - PanArmenian News

Peter Eicher, the head the OSCE mission observing the elections held in Azerbaijan was beaten yesterday by the special element of the Azeri ministry of Internal Affairs during the storm of the headquarters of Musavat opposition party, all this happening in the presence of dozens of journalists. When commenting on the attack of the Musavat headquarters, Ayker's Polish colleague Hanna Grozdetska told Turan agency that she is "shocked" by what had happened. "The conflict was provoked by a group of military men without any marking. The demonstrators behaved quietly not provoking the opposite party. It appears as if the government forces are waging war against their own people", - the OSCE observer said. Commenting on the elections held, Grozdetska noted that she witnessed a "great number of violations committed by the ruling party".

10/17/03 - Two killed as police, opposition demonstrators clash in azerbaijan - RFE/RL Newsline

Several thousand supporters of defeated presidential candidate and opposition Musavat Party Chairman Isa Gambar fought a pitched battle with police and Interior Ministry troops in central Baku on 16 October, Azerbaijani and Western media reported. In the early afternoon, some 3,000 Gambar supporters began an unsanctioned meeting in central Baku. When police tried to disperse them, they

made their way toward Freedom Square, sparring en route with police and Interior Ministry forces; the number of demonstrators "snowballed," according to zerkalo.az on 17 October, and reached some 8,000. Some 3,000 police and Interior Ministry troops armed with tear gas and smoke bombs and backed by police dogs and water cannons again tried to disperse the demonstrators, firing into the air. The demonstrators responded by hurling stones and attacking police vehicles. Fighting continued for some three hours, first on the square and then on side streets, as police hunted down demonstrators. At least two persons are believed to have died in the melee, a man in his early 50s and a 5-year-old boy who was trampled to death. Dozens of police, demonstrators, and journalists were injured. Prime Minister and President-elect Ilham Aliiev ordered police to restore order in the capital, Interfax reported on 16 October. Interior Minister Ramil Usubov told journalists on 17 October that 174 participants in the clashes have been arrested, ITAR-TASS reported.

10/17/03 - Azerbaijani election observers highlight shortcomings- RFE/RL Newsline

In a preliminary assessment released on 16 October, the International Election Observation Mission comprising experts from the OSCE and the Council of Europe criticized the previous day's presidential ballot in terms that echoed almost verbatim its assessment of the first round of the Armenian presidential election in February (...), according OSCE website(<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elelections>). The statement characterized the poll as falling short of international standards in several respects. It cited the use of violence and excessive force by police; intimidation of opposition supporters and journalists; and the failure to create equal conditions, including equal access to the media, for all eight presidential candidates. IEOM leader Peter Eicher told journalists on 16 October that the ballot was "a missed opportunity for Azerbaijan to hold democratic elections." He pointed to OSCE observer reports of ballot-box stuffing, falsified vote counts, and interference by

unauthorized persons in the voting and the vote count.

10/17/03 - As U.S calls on opposition to act peacefully - RFE/RL Newsline

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said on 16 October that the United States "concurs" with the preliminary OSCE assessment that the 15 October vote was generally orderly, but nonetheless fell short of international standards, RFE/RL reported. Ereli said that U.S. observers had witnessed problems with voter lists, instances of coercion, and "other irregularities." He said Washington calls on the Azerbaijani government to follow through on its OSCE commitments and to safeguard the rights of the country's citizens. At the same time, Ereli called on the opposition "to act peacefully and within the law." "We urge all parties to take all steps to restore public order and avoid further violence," he said.

10/18/03 - Ilham Aliyev Declared Winner Of Presidential Vote - RFE/RL

Prime Minister Ilham Aliyev, the son of outgoing President Heidar Aliyev, has been declared the winner by a landslide in the 15 October presidential elections. Mezhahir Panahov, head of the Central Election Commission, told media representatives on 16 October that with 91 percent of the ballots counted, Prime Minister Ilham Aliyev was the clear winner with 79.5 percent of the vote, defeating seven rival candidates. "There will not be a second round. Ilham Aliyev is far ahead of his opponents," said Panahov. "His nearest rival, opposition leader Isa Gambar, trailed with 12.1 percent." He added that the final results would be published within the next two weeks.

However, Aliyev's victory is being disputed by Gambar, who claims that he won the election by a majority. A demonstration of Musavat activists gathered before the Musavat headquarters late on 15 October, a scene that turned violent and led to battles with police. Several dozen people were wounded and some Musavat activists were arrested. Human

Rights Watch cited international observers as saying police attacked Musavat activists with no reason.

On 16 October, new clashes occurred after several thousand opposition backers surged down one of Baku's main thoroughfares on Liberty Square. Interior Ministry soldiers and police officers used batons, metal shields, dogs, and tear gas, and fired shots into the air. According to initial reports, at least one demonstrator was killed and nearly 200 protestors were arrested.

10/21/03 – Azerbaijani opposition bloc again rejects them - RFE/RL Newsline

The Our Azerbaijan election bloc comprising more than 30 political parties and organizations that supported Qambar's candidacy addressed a statement on 20 October to the UN, the European Parliament, the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the presidents of the United States, Russia, and Turkey, calling on them "to condemn the dictatorship that violated the rights of the Azerbaijani people and usurped power by means of repression," Turan reported. The statement again affirmed that despite the irregularities, Qambar received the most votes.

10/27/03 - International And Local Observers Discord Over Election Results - RFE/RL

At a 17 October press conference, a group of 188 observers from central and Eastern Europe, representing the OSCE at the presidential elections, disagreed with the preliminary conclusion of Peter Eicher, head of the OSCE Election Observation Mission. According to them, Eicher downplayed the fraud observed during the vote, and the 15 October elections fell short of the democratic election principles.

Commenting on the contradictions among European observers, Eicher told RFE/RL that their statement is an official one which has been prepared on basis of information provided by some 600 observers. "Of course, everybody can have his or her own opinion as well. But we expressed the OSCE official position."

A number of local observers also accuse the authorities of resorting to vote rigging. "The presidential elections were accompanied by numerous irregularities and falsifications," according to For Free and Fair Elections, an organization uniting non-governmental, political and international organizations.

At a 20 October press conference, Arzu Abdullaeva, the director of Helsinki Citizens Assembly Azerbaijan National Committee, said that the vote was marred by massive irregularities that call into question its fairness. Professor Eldar Ismailov pointed to the exclusion of observers from polling stations during the vote-counting process.*

10/27/03 - Human Rights Watchdog Expresses Concern About Post-Election Atmosphere - RFE/RL

The 16 October violence in Baku between opposition supporters and police has sparked arrests of Musavat and other opposition activists throughout the country. While some of those arrested have been released, most of them have been sentenced to short-term imprisonment.

Meanwhile, according to Rauf Arifoglu, editor-in-chief of the opposition "Yeni Musavat," the state-owned publishing house on 17 October refused to print the newspaper. But the newspaper is now being printed at another publishing house. "But we have information that the newspaper is being removed from sale," Arifoglu said.

On 16 and 17 October Reporters Without Borders issued statements regarding the government's alleged violence against media representatives during the presidential elections and subsequent protests

"We are very alarmed by the surge of violence against journalists and we remind you that free press coverage of an election is one of the criteria considered by the international community before recognizing its legitimacy," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Robert Mnard said in a letter to Interior Minister Ramil Usubov. According to information gathered by Reporters Without Borders, at least 25 local and foreign journalists were badly

beaten by the security forces during the opposition demonstration in Baku. Several had to be hospitalized. "Meanwhile, unidentified men in civilian dress confiscated more than 20,000 copies of opposition newspapers from news stands in several cities. Copies were also taken from street vendors," Reporters Without Borders concludes.

10/29/03 – Azerbaijan's Ministry of culture accuses foreign Minister of Armenia of "outrageous lie" - Arminfo

The Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan called "an outrageous lie" the Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian's accusations of destruction of Armenian monuments of culture in the territory Azerbaijan, made by Oskanian during the recent sitting of UNESCO. Baku's newspaper "Echo" reports, Head of Department of protection of monuments of history and culture of the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan Rizvan Bayramov commented on the statement of the Foreign Minister of Armenia. According to him, it's enough to be in the village Juga to be convinced of that, where is the aforementioned cemetery. "The village is situated at the border with Iran, more exactly, it is in the frontier zone. Entrance there is restricted. That's why the systematic destruction of monuments Oskanian said, and removal of crosses, are impossible", Rizvan Bayramov said. At the same time he mentioned that the statements of Oskanian about that the aforementioned architectural monuments are of Armenian origin, are ridiculous. "In that cemetery sculptors carve horses, sheep and others. And all they concern the muslim culture. As regards the khachkars (cross stones) in the village Juga, they are of Albanian origin".

It should be noted that Foreign Minister of Armenia accused Azerbaijan of systematic destruction of Armenian cultural and historic monuments. He also invited UNESCO representatives to visit the region and make sure of what happened.

ARMENIA / ARMENIE**10/01/03 – Council of Europe
reprieve disappoints Armenian
opposition - RFE/RL Newline**

Armenian opposition leaders criticized on 30 September the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) failure to follow through on its threats to sanction the Armenian government for serious irregularities during the presidential and parliamentary elections earlier this year, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Opposition Artarutiun bloc leader and defeated presidential candidate Stepan Demirchian told RFE/RL the Council of Europe "should be consistent in the pursuit of its own values." Other opposition politicians suggested the council might have reached a secret agreement with the Armenian leadership to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new Armenian PACE delegation in return for Armenia's full abolition of capital punishment.

**10/01/03 – Armenia reaffirms
desire for EU membership -
RFE/RL Newline**

Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian told RFE/RL in Brussels on 30 September that "our goal is not just to become a part of the EU, but also to achieve EU standards." Oskanian was speaking after a session of the Armenia-EU Cooperation Council that focused on bringing Armenian legislation into line with EU standards, Armenian trade with the EU, and transport and energy issues, including the EU demand -- which Armenia rejects -- for the swift closure of the Medzamor nuclear-power station.

**10/03/03 – Gayane Mukoyan's
colleagues say her beating is
connected with her professional
activities - ArmlInfo News**

The staff of the Or newspaper say that the Sept 27 beating of their chief editor Gayane Mukoyan was an order. (...)The incident is yet another result of the atmosphere of impunity and illegality created by the former and actual authorities. Almost all the

chief editors of the leading Armenian newspapers have been attacked since 1992, but "none of the assaulters have been detected to date." Being unable to constitutionalize censorship representatives of some circles put it into practice by pressuring journalists with a view to create internal censorship and showing them the limits they cannot pass. Or is resuming its work next week and is firmly resolved to continue publishing sharp articles in contempt of the "immunity" of some oligarchs and officials. "One can kill one of us, two, three, but not all the people valuing the force of a journalist's word."

**10/06/03 – World Armenian
organization founding congress
being held in Moscow -
ArmenPress**

The first day of founding congress of the World Armenian Organization (WAO) was held today in Moscow with representatives of 138 organizations from 52 countries attending it.

The ambitious idea of establishing an all-Armenian international body in the form of WAO was suggested by the Union of Russian Armenians (URA). (...) The goals and purposes of a Pan-Armenian organization are not limited to institutionalizing Armenia's relations with the Diaspora. URA president Ara Abrahamian has emphasized that the founding of WAO "is not an end in itself but is an instrument for the attainment of goals". The main of them, he said, is to combine the efforts of the Armenians of the whole world "in the name of the upholding of human values and national interests, and assistance in the fight against such global threats to mankind as international terrorism and poverty".

WAO also intends to promote a settlement of Armenian-Turkish relations and a solution to the Nagorno-Karabagh issue. Besides, Abrahamian pointed out, the establishment of WAO will promote a further socio-economic development of Armenia, the strengthening of its international prestige and statehood. "The leaders of Russia and Armenia fully support the idea of founding WAO," Abrahamian emphasized.

The major task facing Russia and Armenia is to turn the Caucasus

into a region of stability and economic co-operation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a constituent congress of the Armenian World Organization.

(...) Armenian president Robert Kocharian in turn said the World Armenian Organization aims to consolidate Armenian people around the globe. Addressing participants of the congress he said: "Your organization can promote the national idea of an efficient and capable country and a strong Diaspora." (...)

**10/08/03 – Monitoring held to
disclose reasons and figures of
murders and suicides in armed
forces - AZG Armenian Daily**

An Armenian non-governmental organization, called Soldier's Mother, intends to complete until April 15, 2004 an in-depth monitoring of the situation in the Armenian armed forces to reveal reasons behind cases of murders and suicides. The Great Britain's embassy in Yerevan has pledged to provide funds for implementation of the monitoring.

Reasons that prompted peacetime army murders and suicides are being revealed through conversations with the parents of the servicemen, military officers and psychologists by the organization's representatives in partnership with military prosecutors.

In the words of the NGO's chairperson Greta Mirzoyan the monitoring also aims to find out whether the recruited young men that committed suicide during their service had problems with psychology before joining the armed forces of Armenia.

The results of the monitoring will be published in a booklet.

**10/08/03 – Transparency
international research : Armenia
78th as for corruption level-
ARKA-MFD**

Transparency International conducted a research, according to which Armenia is the 78th as for the corruption level. The report of the agency represents 133 states (31 more than last year). Bangladesh, Nigeria and Haiti turned out the most corrupted countries. Some of the post-Soviet republics - Georgia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan - were listed among the first ten most

corrupted countries. According to the rating, the least amount of bribe-takers are in New Zealand, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. The index of corruption is determined on the basis of polls conducted among businessmen, scientists and analysts. Transparency International calculates the index giving countries from 1 to 10 points. The 'purest' nations receive 10 points, and those that collected less than 5 points are considered problematic. Armenia collected 3 points this year, the level of corruption is almost the same in Turkey (77th place) and Iran (79 place).

10/09/03 – Bill on alternative military service passed in first reading - ArmenPress

By a vote of 90 and 2 against the Armenian parliament passed on Wednesday in the first reading a bill on alternative military service. Vahan Hovhanesian, deputy parliament chairman from the ARF, the main "driving force" behind the bill in its current form, told lawmakers that the passage of law is a humanitarian and political necessity linked directly with the nation's security and stems also from Armenia's commitments it assumed when joining the Council of Europe in 2001.

(...) Under the bill only restricted groups of citizens, members of registered religious groups, who are prohibited from carrying arms may apply for an alternative service in the army. Hovhanesian admitted that European experts suggest to enlarge groups of citizens that would be eligible to alternative military service, but as he said "it is not possible under Armenia's conditions, as military service in Armenian armed forces is still compulsory."

Another provision of the bill that bans conscripts who served half of their term to apply for alternative service is also questioned by international experts, who say the ban must be removed. The bill sets the term for alternative service at 42 months, whereas the compulsory service lasts 24 months. This is also protested by experts who suggest that 42 months should be shortened.

Hovhanesian argued that the demand is not fair as compulsory

conscripts endanger their life. "Compulsory servicemen are on duty 16 hours a day while alternative servicemen will be working 8 hours a day," he said citing the examples of other countries in which the term of compulsory service is usually shorter than that of the alternative service.

Under the bill alternative military service will be within the armed forces. Hovhanesian said the main provisions of the bill were approved by the defense ministry.

10/09/03 – U.S will resist encroachment upon Armenia's territorial integrity, Ambassador says - ArmenPress

A senior US diplomat downplayed Wednesday concerns that Turkey poses security threats to Armenia. Speaking to reporters at US embassy in Yerevan ambassador John Ordway said Turkey is a strategic partner of the US and that it poses no danger to Armenian security "In any case we shall resist any country's encroachment upon Armenian territorial integrity," Ordway said.

The ambassador also declined ideas that territorial disputes may arise between Armenia and Turkey, noting that Armenia has never claimed for lands outside its state borders. "I think that both countries accept as a basis the borders fixed by Helsinki Convention, which must be kept unchanged if there are no new arrangements or treaties," he said. Ordway also welcomed Armenian and Turkish foreign ministers meetings aimed to start a productive dialogue for normalization of both nations' relations.

10/10/03- Azerbaijan and Turkey refuse compromise - YERKIR weekly online

Third annual intergovernmental meeting of TRACECA (Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor) took place on October 9. During that meeting Azerbaijani representative Akif Mustafaev said that the issue of opening borders can be discussed only after peaceful settlement of the Karabagh conflict.

The head of Turkish delegation, Meti Kati refused to answer the question about the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border. He said that this is a transportation issue

while the question concerns politics, and he is not a politician.

As for the Armenian position, Armenian Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications Andranik Manukian says that our country approaches the issue of opening the borders from economical position, while Turkey does it from the political one.(...)

"It is a great honor for Armenia to host the third annual meeting of the intergovernmental committee of TRASECA," Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications Manukian said in his opening speech. "The event is moreover notable as this year is the tenth anniversary of creation of the project. Besides, it is the fifth anniversary of signing basic intergovernmental agreement and the most essential document on developing the international transportation rout, Europe-Caucasus-Asia."

He said that though Armenia de facto became the crossroad of TRASECA project, Turkey and Azerbaijan are always setting conditions, when it comes to voting for the map approved by TRASECA and which indicates routs passing through Armenia.

The minister believes that if Turkey demonstrates political will and lifts the blockade, than this corridor will work, since it is very effective and can become an alternative transportation corridor for other projects.

(...) There is information about financial issues of TRASECA project. It is about 64.5 million euros. However, no agreement was reached on it during discussions the day before.

TRASECA was founded in 1993 during a meeting in Brussels. Present members of TRASECA are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Turkmenistan.

10/14/03 – Embattled Armenian TV station again denied new frequency - RFE/RL Newsline

Armenia's National Commission on Television and Radio on 13 October rejected for the third time a bid by the independent television station A1+ for a new frequency that would have enabled it to resume broadcasting, Noyan Tapan and

RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. A1+ went off the air in April 2002 after losing a tender for the frequency on which it had been broadcasting. Its subsequent tender bids were also rejected. The commission ruled that A1+ submitted inaccurate data concerning its intellectual-property and financial assets. Several press commentaries on 14 October rejected that argument as ludicrous and unconvincing. Opposition parliament deputy Viktor Dallakian (Artarutiun) criticized the commission's decision as further evidence that the Armenian authorities "are not interested in freedom of expression and the independence of the mass media."

10/14/03 – Armenian journalists' organizations at odds over draft media bill - RFE/RL Newline

Three Armenian journalistic associations, including the Yerevan Press Club, issued a statement on 10 October accusing the more radical National Press Club of obstructing their efforts to push through sweeping amendments to a new draft media bill, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Hranush Hakobian, chairwoman of the parliament's Standing Committee on Science, Education, and the Media, has assured the media community that the legislature will remove from the draft several controversial articles, including a requirement that media outlets disclose their sources of noncommercial funding. The National Press Club argues that the proposed changes to the bill are purely cosmetic, and has drafted an alternative bill.

10/15/03 – Protocol of the round table on freedom of information – HETQ online

On September 23 the National Assembly of Armenia adopted a "Law on Freedom of Information". From now on, everyone in Armenia has the right to:

* Request from state and local self-government bodies, as well as private organizations that have monopoly or a leading role in the market, as well as those providing services to the public in the sphere of health, sport, education, culture, social security, transport,

communication and communal services information related to these bodies' activities.

* These bodies have the obligation to give this information within 5 days (or in more complicated cases 30 days).

* They may refuse requested information only in number of very limited cases listed in the law.

* Failure to comply with these new rules is a criminal offence.(...)

10/17/03 - Schiff introduces genocide insurance legislation Bill will ease getting access to lists of ancestors entitled to claims on policies issued before 1915 - Glendale News Press

Legislation seeking to help survivors of those killed in the Armenian Genocide collect on pre-genocide insurance policies has been launched by a local lawmaker.

Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Glendale) on Thursday introduced the Armenian Victims Insurance Fairness Act.

If passed and signed by the president, it would give states the authority to assist survivors of the Armenian Genocide, and the families of those killed, in making insurance claims.

(...)The bill allows states to require insurance companies doing business in a given state to disclose genocide-era insurance information, a key provision since Armenian families have not been able to get the insurance companies to disclose policyholders from the era.

The legislation also expresses congressional disapproval of an executive branch policy or agreement that preempts states' ability to enforce the policy, Schiff said.

(...)In September, Schiff introduced similar legislation to assist survivors of the Holocaust. As a state senator in 2000, he introduced similar successful legislation for Armenians relating to statutes of limitations for filing insurance claims.(...)

10/22/03 – Armenia introduces post of Ombudsman - RFE/RL Newline

Parliament deputies passed a draft bill on the creation of the post of ombudsman in its third and final reading on 21 October by a vote of 90-1, Noyan Tapan reported.

The law envisages that candidates for the post, who must be at least 35 years old with a university education, are proposed by the president and must be approved by a minimum three-fifths of all parliament deputies. Compliance with that requirement is complicated, however, by the fact that the Armenian Constitution does not envisage the post of ombudsman. A corresponding constitutional amendment will be one of several to be submitted to a referendum early in 2004, according to Interfax. Meanwhile, the president will appoint an ombudsman after consultations with all parliamentary factions and parties.

10/23/03 - Armenia, Iran set to build gas pipeline - Prime-TASS news agency

Armenia is holding talks with Iran concerning the construction of a natural gas pipeline between the two countries and how to raise the 150m dollars needed for its construction, Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Ruben Shugaryan said in a statement on Thursday [23 October]. According to Shugaryan, the construction of the pipeline "will provide the country with an alternative source for generating electric power and will be one more step towards lifting the communication blockade of Armenia".

(...)

10/29/03 – World bank official opposes ceding more Armenian energy facilities to Russia - RFE/RL Newline

The transfer to Russia's state-run Unified Energy Systems (EES) of more Armenian energy facilities would be "undesirable," World Bank official Gevorg Sargsian told RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau on 28 October.(...)

Sargsian stressed that "we have nothing against EES or any other foreign company," but that the bank would prefer that other owners acquire the power facilities remaining to be privatized.

GEORGIA / GEORGIE**10/02/03 - Armenian-Georgian border to be divided into four sectors - Mediamax news agency**

The Armenian and Georgian commissions for the demarcation and delimitation of the state border held a joint meeting in Yerevan on Wednesday [1 October].

The press service of the Armenian Foreign Ministry told Mediamax news agency that during the meeting, the sides agreed on the expediency of dividing the Armenian-Georgian border into four sectors.

The sides also agreed to prepare within two months their own options for demarcating the state border between Armenia and Georgia and to submit them to the next joint session of the commissions which will be held in Tbilisi in December 2003.

10/03/03 - Georgian election registration ends - RFE/RL

The deadline expired on 2 October for the registration with the Central Election Commission of lists of candidates who will contest the 150 seats in the new legislature to be allocated under the proportional system, Caucasus Press reported. A total of nine blocs and 15 individual parties will contest the ballot. Some, including the pro-presidential For a New Georgia (AS) and the opposition Burdjanadze-Democrats blocs, have made public the names of the persons on their party lists, while others have not yet done so. Also on 2 October, the Georgian Interior Ministry issued a statement calling on the opposition National Movement (EM) not to violate the law in the course of its electioneering, Caucasus Press reported. EM activists clashed with supporters of former regional administrator Levan Mamaladze of the AS in southern Georgia last week.

10/03/03 - Search for abducted Georgian politician continues - RFE/RL

At the weekly meeting in western Georgia among Georgian and Abkhaz security officials and members of the UN Observer

Mission and the Russian peacekeeping force deployed under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone, the Abkhaz and Russian representatives said they will continue to search for Democratic Justice Party member Roland Changelia, who was abducted on 25 September, Caucasus Press reported.

Friends of Changelia subsequently abducted a member of the Russian peacekeeping force whom they intended to exchange for him, and who was released following a joint Georgian police and Russian action on 30 September.

10/03/02 - Bombs destroyed under OSCE-supervised disarmament project in Georgia - OSCE

Demolition of dangerously unstable bombs under an OSCE project commenced this week at a former military airbase at Shiraki in Eastern Georgia.

It signals the next phase of the project for the "Recycling and Destruction of Stockpiles of Ammunition and Bombs on Former Military Bases in Georgia", which is being implemented by the Georgian Military Scientific and Technical Centre 'Delta' and supervised by the OSCE Mission to Georgia.

"We passed a milestone on Wednesday in the process which will free Georgia of the dangerous stockpiles of ammunition and bombs," said David Pirtskhalava, Vice General Director of Delta and manager of the project.

"When you consider what we are doing today was only an idea 12 months ago, we have come a long way. A lot of the credit must go to the OSCE for its ability to react quickly and take active measures for dealing with the threats posed by the existence of these stockpiles."

Up to 500 dangerously unstable bombs located at Shiraki Airbase will be destroyed over the coming months. The destruction process will then focus on bombs located at other bases throughout Georgia.

The project also includes dismantling and recycling various types of artillery ammunition at a new centre at Dedoplistskaro. The Centre was constructed during the first stage of the project and is now fully operational. Artillery ammunition has already been transported from other bases to the

Centre for recycling. In 2004, it is planned to install equipment for extracting the explosive material (TNT) from artillery shells and bombs that are safe to handle.

The initial stage of this project was funded by the UK, Germany, Turkey, the Netherlands and Sweden. The current stage, which is due for completion in June 2004, is funded by Finland, Germany and the UK.

10/13/03 - Opposition Accuses Azeri Envoy of Interfering in Georgia's Elections - Civil Georgia

Opposition National Movement party accused Azerbaijani's ambassador in Georgia Hajan Hajiev of agitating against the opposition parties in the areas predominately populated by the ethnic Azerbaijanis.

"Recently Hajan Hajiev visited regions populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis and called them for voting for the presidential-backed election bloc [For New Georgia]. He said that some opposition leaders and members are ethnic Armenians," Kamal Muradkhanov, who is ethnic Azeri and member of the National Movement, said at a news briefing today.

He also said that the Azerbaijani's ambassador is interfering in Georgia's elections, thus in the country's internal affairs.

10/14/03 - Georgian Presidential allies warn of opposition "destabilization" - RFE/RL Newsline

Meanwhile, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia predicted at a 13 October press conference in Tbilisi that an opposition political force she decline to name will launch a campaign on 15 October for the ouster of the present Georgian leadership, Caucasus Press and Rustavi-2 reported.

She also urged State Security Minister Khaburzanian to make public the documentation detailing parliament speaker Burdjanadze's alleged collaboration with Russian intelligence agencies. On 14 October, Minister of State Avtandil Djorbenadze similarly predicted that "certain forces" will try to destabilize the political situation in the run-up to the 2 November parliamentary elections scheduled, Caucasus

Press reported. In related news, Gogi Mikanadze, the AS secretary on the Central Election Commission (CEC), was hospitalised after being attacked and severely beaten late on 12 October by six men who branded him "a traitor," Caucasus Press reported the following day.

10/14/03 - As Georgian opposition leader details alleged scheme for falsifying vote - RFE/RL Newline

National Movement leader Mikhail Saakashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on 13 October that the Georgian authorities have devised a scheme for forging 150,000 ballot papers supposedly cast at 31 constituencies in the Russian Federation by Georgians temporarily living in that country, Caucasus Press and Rustavi-2 reported. Under that scheme, ballots marked in favor of the pro-presidential AS would be substituted for the ballots cast. The Georgian leadership has promised to cede to Russia control of Georgia's energy-distribution system in return for its complicity in the fraud, Saakashvili claimed.

10/14/03 - Fugitive former Georgian security official again barred from contesting Ballot - RFE/RL Newline

The CEC has registered the list of candidates submitted by the Samshoblo (Fatherland) election bloc to contest the party list seats in the 2 November parliamentary election, but struck from that list the name of former Security Minister Igor Giorgadze, who occupied first place, Caucasus Press reported on 11 October. The CEC last month annulled Giorgadze's registration to contest the election in a single-mandate constituency on the grounds that his registration document did not specify his address and was signed by a local official not authorized to do so

10/20/03 - Shevardnadze slams Burjanadze again - Yerkir online

"Always, when I speak about Nino Burjanadze, I remember that she is a woman. Otherwise, I would have been much stricter. I am fair, when I disapprove of her work in the

Parliament, since the legislative body failed to discuss a great deal of vital laws. The Parliament's activity completely depends on its chairperson, while [Burjanadze] is busy defending her party's interests," Shevardnadze said in his radio broadcast on October 20. He recommended Burjanadze not to make statements against the President, adding, "politics is a science to be done by the men." Despite these statements, President Shevardnadze said he did not confront the Parliamentary Chairperson and called on the voters to support the "honest people" in the upcoming elections.

10/26/03 - Over 600 foreign observers to monitor parliamentary elections in Georgia - Georgian Radio

Over 600 foreign observers will take part in monitoring the 2 November parliamentary elections in Georgia. The Central Electoral Commission has registered 12 international organizations and 44 local and foreign nongovernmental organizations.

A group of observers from the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States will also arrive in Georgia to monitor the elections. The group is headed by the deputy chairman of the Federation Council of Russia as heard - Markelov is First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council's Committee on CIS Affairs, Konstantin Markelov. The delegation includes representatives of parliaments of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

10/29/03 - Georgian opposition protests dismissal of election commission heads - RFE/RL Newline

The heads of at least 15, and possibly 17 local election commissions in the west Georgian town of Kutaisi were dismissed on 27 October for unspecified "serious irregularities," Georgian media reported.

Opposition parties staged a protest against the dismissals the following day. Parliament speaker Burdjanadze, who is running in a single-mandate constituency in Kutaisi, told protest participants that

the Georgian authorities are planning to falsify the outcome of the ballot in the town.

10/30/03 - Russia completes pull-out of ammunition from Georgian depot - Prime-News news agency

Transfer of ammunition, property and weapons from (Russia's) 430th ammunition depot near (the eastern Georgian town of) Sagarejo to the 102nd military base in Gyumri (Armenia) has been completed, the head of the press service of the Group of Russian Troops in the Transcaucasus, Col Aleksandr Lutskevich, told Prime-News.

Lutskevich said that "the ammunition, property and weapons were transferred in accordance with the respective protocol signed by the Georgian and Russian sides". Aleksandr Lutskevich noted that now the Russian side is going to start reclamation of the soil and examination of the area for any hazardous materials. (Passage omitted)

10/30/03 - One Georgian parliamentary candidate shot at a second abducted and beaten - RFE/RL Newline

Zviad Chokheli, a member of the opposition New Rightists who is running in the 2 November Georgian parliamentary elections in a single-mandate constituency, was shot at two times late on 29 October, surviving only thanks to a bulletproof vest, Georgian media reported. His car was destroyed by a bomb 30 minutes later, but Chokheli was not in the vehicle at the time. Also late on 29 October, Revival Union candidate Temur Goksadze was pulled from his car, beaten, and thrown into a river, Caucasus Press and the website of the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported.

DAGHESTAN / DAGHESTAN

10/07/03 – Eight arrested on suspicion of murder of Minister in Daghestan - RFE/RL

Eight of 14 people suspected of the murder six weeks ago of Daghestan's Nationalities Minister Magomedsalikh Gusaev have been arrested in Daghestan, Russian Interior Ministry official Vladimir Gordienko said in an interview published in the 6 October issue of "Moskovskii komsomolets" and summarized by Interfax the same day. Gusaev was killed by a car bomb in Makhachkala on 27 August.

ABKHAZIA / ABKHAZIE

10/01/03 – Abkhazia celebrates 10 years of independence - RFE/RL

The unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia celebrated on 30 September the 10th anniversary of its de facto independence following the withdrawal of Georgian forces from Sukhum at the end of the 1992-93 war, Caucasus Press reported. The celebrations, which included a military parade, were attended by a delegation from the similarly unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and unnamed senior Russian officials and Russian State Duma deputies, according to rustavi-2.com. Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba, who returned last week from an extended period of medical treatment in Moscow, did not attend the celebrations.

10/06/03 – Georgian, Abkhaz officials seek to minimize energy shortages - RFE/RL

Georgian and Abkhaz energy officials met on 4 October to discuss how to minimize the impact of the reduction of the generating capacity at the Inguri hydroelectric-power station, Caucasus Press reported. The Abkhaz staff reduced power supplies to Georgia late the previous day without warning after the water level in the station's

reservoir fell below the required minimum. Further talks will take place on 7 October. Georgian Fuel and Energy Minister Mamuka Nikolaishvili said on 6 October that most regions of Georgia will have only limited supplies of electricity until the end of the month when the Tbilisi thermal-power station will be in a position to make up for the shortfall.

10/07/03 – Abkhaz foreign Ministry condemns Georgian "terrorist" acts - RFE/RL

In a 6 October statement posted on abkhaziya.info and summarized by Caucasus Press the following day, the Abkhaz Foreign Ministry appeals to the UN to condemn an incident the previous day in which unidentified armed men opened fire near the Abkhaz village of Saberio on a car in which two Abkhaz border guards and two civilians were traveling, killing three of them. Abkhaz police pursued the attackers, who retreated toward the internal border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, and killed two of them. The statement terms that attack the result of the Georgian authorities' deliberate disregard of the most recent UN Security Council resolution on Abkhazia, which called yet again on Tbilisi to curtail the activities of "illegal armed groups" in the Abkhaz conflict zone. Also on 6 October, Dato Shengelia, who heads the Forest Brothers Georgian guerrilla group, denied that Georgian guerrillas were responsible for the Saberio attack, Caucasus Press reported. Meanwhile a spokesman for the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government in exile said on 6 October that the two men killed by Abkhaz were "civilians who were massacred by Abkhaz gunmen" in the village of Gagida on 4 October, Caucasus Pres reported.

10/09/03 – Georgian, Abkhaz delegations sign security protocol - RFE/RL

Georgian and Abkhaz government delegations headed by Georgian Minister for Special Assignments Malkhaz Kakabadze (Tbilisi's point man for Abkhazia) and Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba, respectively, met in Gali on 8 October with UN Special Envoy for the Abkhaz conflict Heidi Tagliavini to discuss the recent deterioration of

the situation in the Abkhaz conflict zone, including the 5 October murders of three Abkhaz, Caucasus Press reported. The two ministers signed a protocol in which they undertake "to cooperate and take immediate measures to stop criminal activities...that have a serious impact on security" in the conflict zone. They also agreed to cooperate fully with the UN police force that is to be deployed in the conflict zone to prepare for the repatriation of Georgian displaced persons forced to flee Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war. Shamba told Interfax on 8 October that delegations from both Tbilisi and Sukhum will visit Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosova later this month to familiarize themselves with UN police operations there.

10/09/03 – Agree on return of dead gunmen - RFE/RL

A separate agreement was reached during the 8 October Gali meeting that the Abkhaz will hand over to the Georgian side the bodies of two men killed in the 5 October incident -although Georgian officials insist the two men were not Georgian citizens -- in exchange for the release of an Abkhaz man seized by Georgian guerrillas on 5 October.

10/10/03 – Abkhaz opposition urges amendments to law on Presidential elections - RFE/RL

In a statement released on 9 October, the opposition party Aitaira urged the Abkhaz parliament to enact amendments to the law on the presidential elections, Caucasus Press reported. The statement charged that due to serious illness, incumbent President Vladislav Ardzinba is no longer capable of discharging his duties, and that the parliament should play the main role in electing a new president. Ardzinba returned to Sukhum late last month after three months' hospital treatment in Moscow, but failed to attend the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the end of the 1992-93 war with Georgia. Most of Aitaira's candidates were barred from contesting last year's parliamentary ballot.

10/15/03 – Intelligence chief denies Chechen presence in Abkhazia - RFE/RL

Givi Agrba, who heads the intelligence service of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, denied on 14 October that Chechen militants and international terrorists who left Georgia's Pankisi Gorge one year ago in advance of a mass Georgian police action could have taken refuge in Abkhazia. Georgian Intelligence chief Avtandil Ioseliani, who served as a KGB official in Abkhazia prior to the 1992-93 war, made that claim in the 14 October issue of the Georgian newspaper "Tribuna." Ioseliani implied that the Chechens entered Abkhazia by sea, given that Georgia is unable to control Abkhaz territorial waters.

10/30/03 – Abkhaz parliament fails to pass new election law - RFE/RL

The parliament of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia postponed on 29 October the second reading of a draft law on parliamentary elections because of disagreements on unspecified key aspects, Caucasus Press reported.

During a 23 October discussion of the draft, Vyacheslav Tsugba, who is chairman of the parliamentary commission tasked with drafting the law, noted that since its passage in the first reading in early August, numerous amendments have been proposed, most of which have been incorporated into the draft. On 24 October, the Forum for National Reconciliation, on which all Abkhaz political parties and movements are represented, also discussed both the amended draft law on parliamentary elections and the need to amend the existing law on presidential elections, according to the Abkhaz parliament press service, as cited on abkhaziya.info. Irina Agrba of the opposition movement Aitaira pointed out that the outcome of the next presidential ballot to elect a successor to ailing President Vladislav Ardzinba will depend partly on the composition of the new Central Election Commission. The People's Party has proposed amending the draft law on parliamentary elections to provide for the inclusion on the CEC of representatives of various parties who will have the right to make recommendations to that body.

SOUTH OSSETIA / OSSETIE DU SUD

10/02/03 – South Ossetia cabinet reshuffle - Caucasus Reporting Service

New premier tells IWPR he has to revitalise the republic's stagnant economic sector. By Inga Kochieva in Tskhinval South Ossetia's new government appointees are strengthening the hand of President Eduard Koikoty in his bid to assert control over the unrecognised republic's economy.

Two powerful posts, that of defence and emergency minister and of prime minister, have been taken up in the last week by two men new to politics. The former position has gone to Zelim Muldarov, who until recently served in Russia's 58th army, stationed in the North Caucasus. The latter and most important job has been handed to Igor Sanakoyev, who has spent the last decade since the Georgian-Ossetian conflict of 1991 outside South Ossetia.

Most local observers agree that Kokoity is clearing his cabinet of the influence of the criminal circles which were dominant in the republic until recently. Several of the ministers who were sacked by the president on July 1 belonged to the "Tedeyev brothers group" which controlled money flows into and out of the republic.

[...] The new premier's candidacy was approved almost unanimously by parliament. "Hardly anyone knows Sanakoyev and his approval by deputies without any objections is an expression of support for the president and the changes he has announced," explained press and information minister Batradz Kharebov.

[...] The new prime minister said his first priority was to reinvigorate the economy, arguing that "if the republic can get on its feet economically then it will be easier to resolve its political problems, I'm firmly convinced of that".

[...] As a first step, Sanakoyev said he would be cutting the government bureaucracy. Reportedly the number of ministries will be reduced from 13 to nine and many officials will lose their jobs.

[...] "We have not only to create a financial and banking system from

nothing but to devise a programme for creating new jobs," Sanakoyev said. "Our local resources are very promising in this regard - our mineral water springs, construction materials, our forests. We definitely have to get timber production going and develop our agriculture."

[...] Non-governmental organisations have cautiously welcomed the government reshuffle. Pyotr Gassiev, head of the local branch of the Open Society Institute, said, "The previous government was for the most part not formed by the current president, it was the remnants of the previous regime which he is now clearing away to make his own team. It was very difficult to work independently." Gassiev said that the old government officials had frequently asked for financial support for projects, failing to understand the boundary between governmental and non-governmental.

"Now we and the president understand each other," Gassiev said. "But in a small society there are still many issues which have to be decided jointly with the authorities. So if just 50 per cent of the people in the government do their jobs properly, we can do ours."

Inga Kochieva is a correspondent for the newspaper Molodezh Yuzhnoi Ossetii newspaper in Tskhinval.

10/09/03 – South Ossetia denies harboring former Georgian security chief - RFE/RL

The Foreign Ministry of the unrecognized republic of South Ossetia has issued a statement denying that former Georgian State Security Minister Igor Giorgadze is currently living on the territory of South Ossetia, Caucasus Press reported on 8 October. Giorgadze fled Georgia in the fall of 1995 after being accused of masterminding the August 1995 car-bomb attack on then-Georgian parliament Chairman Eduard Shevardnadze, Giorgadze's application to register as a candidate in the 2 November Georgian parliamentary election was rejected. His wife on 7 October pleaded in Tbilisi with visiting U.S. General (Retired) John Shalikashvili for help in obtaining political asylum in the United States, Caucasus Press reported.

10/16/03 - Chair hosts talks in The Hague on Georgian-Ossetian conflict - OSCE

Negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict are taking place in The Hague, under the auspices of the OSCE's Netherlands Chairmanship. The Georgian and South Ossetian delegations, together with the Russian, North Ossetian and OSCE mediators, are meeting with an aim to achieve progress in overcoming the consequences of the 1989-1992 conflict.

The talks, which started on 14 October, are held within the framework of the 10th Meeting of the Political Experts Group dealing with the issue.

**CHECHNYA /
TCHETCHENIE**

10/01/03 - Chechen Parliament appeals to international community - RFE/RL

In a statement posted on 30 September by chechenpress.com, 25 deputies to the Chechen parliament elected in July 1997 appealed to the international community not to recognize the legitimacy of the 5 October Chechen presidential election.

They argued that free elections are not possible as long as Chechnya is occupied by Russian troops. The deputies denied that they participated in the reported Chechen parliament session that allegedly voted in favor of the impeachment of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov.

10/07/03 - U.S criticizes Chechen Presidential election - RFE/RL

U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in Washington on 6 October that the presidential election in Chechnya the previous day, and the attendant election campaign, "fell short of the potential for producing a positive democratic outcome" and "did not meet international standards for fair and free elections," Reuters reported. Boucher said that Washington is "disappointed by

this missed opportunity," adding that "it is unclear whether the election will have sufficient credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Chechnya to advance the settlement process."

10/20/03 - New Chechen President inaugurated - RFE/RL

Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov was inaugurated as Chechen president amid tight security measures in the town of Gudermes on 19 October, Russian agencies reported.

Kadyrov announced before the ceremony that he would not swear the inaugural oath on the Koran as "I am not the leader of an Islamic state," ITAR-TASS reported.

Kadyrov swore in Russian to implement the Chechen Constitution and uphold human rights and freedoms. Representatives from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and neighboring North Caucasus republics, including Kabardino-Balkaria's President Valerii Kokov, attended the ceremony, as did Russian presidential administration head Aleksandr Voloshin and Russian Minister for Chechen Affairs Stanislav Ilyasov.

10/20/03 - Outgoing Chechen Premier named to head new government - RFE/RL

Kadyrov appointed outgoing Prime Minister Anatolii Popov on 18 October to head the new Chechen government. Popov told ITAR-TASS the following day that the outgoing government will continue to work until the new one is named, which, he continued, will be within 14 days. He said he will have four or five deputies, whose candidacies will be agreed with Kadyrov, and that there will be some changes in the cabinet, although Interior Minister Alu Alkhanov will retain his post. Following the 5 October presidential election, both Kadyrov and Popov ruled out any sweeping changes in the composition of the government.

10/20/03 - Maskhadov predicts Chechen population will unite against new President - RFE/RL

Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov, who was elected president in 1997 in a ballot recognized by Moscow and the international community as free and fair, told Reuters in a

written interview received in Moscow on 17 October that the entire Chechen population hates Kadyrov, and that Kadyrov's elevation to the presidency will trigger a new influx of recruits to the armed opposition. Maskhadov acknowledged that the population is "tired" after four years of war, but added that he believes Chechens still support the armed resistance.

10/20/03 - 'The Chechens are ready to wage a war with the Azerbaijanis against the Armenians in Karabagh' - Pravda.ru

'The Chechens are ready to wage a war with the Azerbaijanis against the Armenians in Karabagh',- said Chechen Human Rights Leader Mairbek Taramov in an interview to Azeri Echo newspaper. 'When considering the current mood of the Chechen people, I know that in case of any confrontation, they will be a vanguard in the struggle for the independence of Azerbaijan. The Chechens are ready to wage war for Nagorny Karabagh. And Russia understands that. It is impossible to believe one word of the Russian delegation. Today (Russian Security Council Secretary Vladimir) Rushailo says one thing, and (Russian President Vladimir) Putin discusses completely different questions with the Armenians in Russia,' he said. During the Nagorny Karabagh war (1991-94), Chechen mercenaries (not more than a hundred) took part in battles on the side of the Azerbaijani army.

**NAGORNO KARABAKH /
HAUT KARABAGH**

10/07/03 - Armenia hopes to break ice over Karabakh dispute with new Azeri leader - Agence France Press

Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian said Monday that Yerevan hoped to break the ice with Azerbaijan over their Nagorno-Karabakh dispute after Azeris elect a new president in elections later this month.

Ilham Aliyev, whose ailing father, Heidar, the current Azeri leader,

announced his retirement on Thursday, clearing the way for his son to succeed him, is expected to win the October 15 poll in the former Soviet republic. "We hope to see as the next president of Azerbaijan a man who is ready to pursue negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," Oskanian said.

The 41-year-old heir apparent "has been informed of the state of negotiations," the foreign minister told reporters, adding that the Armenian government hoped Ilham would "resume the talks at the point at which they were suspended."

Oskanian urged the new government in Azerbaijan to build on the efforts of international mediators in the Minsk Group in recent years.(...)

10/08/03 - Ordway Says Military Settlement of MKR Not an Option - Yerkir

US Ambassador to Armenia John Ordway told a news conference on Wednesday that the United States opposes a military settlement of the Karabagh conflict.

"A military solution would not only hurt the two countries, but would also threaten regional security," said Ordway responding to aggressive statements made during presidential election campaigning in Azerbaijan.

Just this week Azeri Prime Minister and presidential candidate Ilham Aliyev declared that the country's main goal was to liberate Karabagh. "If we see that a peaceful way does not bring about results, we have a strong army and strong people, which will assist us in liberating our lands."

The ambassador also said that though he is unaware of the new proposals put forth by the Minsk Group, he nevertheless hopes the talks would result in final settlement.(...)

10/09/03 - Karabakh prisons : a rare glimpse inside - IWPR'S Caucasus Reporting Service

Conditions in Shushi prison are not bad, say inmates - but they have little idea about their rights.

The Armenian region of Nagorny Karabakh is an unrecognised state but, as it seeks dialogue with the outside world, wants to prove that it

measures up to international standards in a number of areas.

That is one reason why the Karabakh Armenian authorities are keen to show that standards in the once-notorious Shushi jail are vastly improved. The political situation is entirely different from the late Eighties and early Nineties when the Azerbaijanis used the prison to lock up Armenian activists. Now it is home only to Armenians convicted of criminal offences.

As part of the Karabakh Armenians' drive to win international respectability, the republic declared that it had replaced the death penalty with life imprisonment as of August 1. And a little before that, this correspondent and leading humanitarian activist, Albert Voskanian, were given the chance to visit the prison in Shushi.

Although we were not given access to its three best-known prisoners, the inmates we did talk to gave us the impression that the authorities are genuinely trying to improve conditions in the jail.

It was with some trepidation that we stepped into Corrective Labour Institution No. 1 just outside Shushi. The prison in Shushi (called Shusha by the Azerbaijanis) was founded in 1869 and won a fearsome reputation in the late Soviet period. One advantage Karabakh has over other parts of the Caucasus, with their often over-crowded prisons, is size. In a small region there are relatively few prisoners to maintain. When IWPR visited, the jail, which can hold 350 prisoners, had 67 inmates, 35 in the regular section, and 32 in the high security wing. There were three more prisoners - hard-core criminals - in the maximum-security wing, and another six recidivists on what used to be the death row.

There are no women or teenagers. By ethnic background, the overwhelming majority of the prisoners are Armenian, with one Russian and one Yezidi Kurd.

We visited both wings and talked to nearly 90 per cent of the prisoners in the presence of prison warders. The cells are equipped with iron-frame bunks, bedside cabinets, tables, benches, and lockers. The walls are whitewashed, the floors concrete. The windows are barred, but without shutters - a fact the

prison administration pointed out as a sign of a more liberal regime.

The prisoners did not complain about their conditions, food, and treatment by prison guards. Some of them, particularly those facing long sentences, grumbled about the concrete floors, which they said were bad for the kidneys and caused rheumatism. "You won't notice anything," said one prisoner, convicted of manslaughter. "You just come and leave, but I've got a few more years here. Can you help us?"

The prisoners asked us expressly to try and raise funds to cover their cell floors with linoleum or some other material to protect them from the cold, damp floors, especially in winter.

Depending on their prison regime, inmates are allowed to receive visitors and food packages, subject to a maximum limit of 50 kg a month, from their family and friends outside. Many of them are allowed to spend up to three days with their spouses in specially designated, fully equipped rooms inside the prison compound.

We were not allowed to visit Karabakh's former defence minister Samvel Babayan and two of his comrades, who were convicted of trying to assassinate Karabakh Armenian leader Arkady Gukasian in March 2000. Their families have complained that the men were beaten in pre-trial detention. The prison authorities said only that their condition was "fine" and pointed out that the International Red Cross has unrestricted access to the men.

"Both the former defence minister and other prisoners in the maximum security wing and on death row are entitled to receive visitors and food packages. In other words, they enjoy all the privileges allowed by law," the chief prison officer told IWPR.

"The fear of losing their visiting entitlement compels prisoners to behave well. Our personnel rarely, if ever, need to use restraining equipment such as batons, handcuffs, or straightjackets."

The prison authorities are also quick to point out that inmates

receive regular health checks and are tested for TB and HIV.

There were three drug addicts among the prisoners, when we visited. They are treated compulsorily by doctors and are prevented from using any narcotics.

There were four homosexuals among the inmates, imprisoned for crimes such as theft - homosexuality is not an offence under Karabakh law. They are all kept in separate cells and watched closely by the guards. The prison personnel try to keep communication between gay and straight prisoners down to a minimum.

The former confirmed to IWPR they have not experience any violent treatment or humiliation. "Considering the Karabakh mentality, and their fierce intolerance of homosexuality, this is great progress," my colleague Albert Voskanian commented.

Voskanian, who initiated the prison visit to Shushi, has also visited Karabakh's other penitentiary, the remand centre in Stepanakert and said that in both places conditions, if not ideal, were basically fine and standards of hygiene were kept up.

A more serious problem, Voskanian noted, is that most of the inmates are very poorly informed about their rights, and therefore unable to exercise them. "It's no secret that many of the prisoners have no legal awareness, and their lawful rights may suffer as a consequence," he said.

He is now raising funds to publish a booklet for prisoners that outlines to them their basic rights. In the mean time, he is sending his reports to the worldwide prison monitoring organization, PRI, Penal Reform International.

One visit gave one snapshot of the jail and Voskanian hopes to continue the prison inspections. He believes that the next step for the authorities is to put the penitentiary system under the authority of the justice ministry instead of the interior ministry. "This would help us achieve international standards more quickly," he said.

Ashot Beglarian is a freelance journalist in Stepanakert, Nagorny Karabakh.

10/11/03 - Gukasyan insists Karabakh conflict to be resolved peacefully - Arminfo

The Nagorny Karabakh conflict will be settled peacefully regardless of who is elected Azerbaijani president, the president of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic (NKR), Arkadiy Gukasyan, told a press conference yesterday. Asked whether a common language could be found with Ilham Aliyev if he were elected Azerbaijani president, the Karabakh head of state said that it was too early to make any predictions about the outcome of the elections. The NKR president said that Ilham Aliyev was not yet an established politician, while an active position on a Karabakh settlement required rich political experience above all. Asked whether the NKR president considered Heydar Aliyev a skilful politician, Gukasyan replied, "Aliyev Senior at least tried to keep the negotiating process on a peaceful path."

10/14/03 - Chechens ready to assist Azeris in Karabakh front - YERKIR Online

If the situation on the Karabakh border escalates, the Chechens will be fighting against Armenians, Maribek Tamarov, a Chechen human rights activist currently residing in Baku told the Baku-based newspaper Echo.

"I know from the mood of Chechens that in case of a confrontation, the Chechens would be on the front line for the Azerbaijani independence fight," Tamarov was quoted as saying.

He also said he regretted that the Azerbaijani authorities yielded before Russia's pressure, and did not allow representatives of Chechens to take part in a Council of Europe sponsored seminar held in Baku on October 6 to 11.(...)

In 1993-1994, along with Afghans, many Chechens were fighting against the Karabakh forces with some of them captured by the Armenians. In his 1995 TV interview to a Russian TV channel, field commander Shamil Basayev had confessed that the defeat at

Martakert in Karabakh was his only defeat.

10/22/03 - OSCE chief urges new push for Karabakh peace - Agence France Presse

Neighbours Azerbaijan and Armenia must breathe new life into the moribund peace process over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, the top official with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said Wednesday.(...)

"It is time for both countries to be bolder and resolve this issue," Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the Dutch foreign minister and holder of the OSCE's rotating presidency said on a visit to the Azeri capital, Baku.

"More intensive efforts should be made to find a solution and that solution should be found in the region itself," said Scheffer. "It is an issue of strategic importance."

He said he hoped Azerbaijan's president-elect Ilham Aliyev, elected last week in a hotly disputed election, would "open a new window of opportunity for the resolution of this conflict."

He announced the OSCE's so-called Minsk Group of international mediators from France, Russia and the United States is due in the region on November 8 to try to push for a peace deal.(...)

10/23/03 - Karabakh leader's aide calls for direct talks with Azerbaijan - Mediamax news agency

The settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh problem has to be discussed between the Nagorny Karabakh Republic [NKR] and Azerbaijan, an adviser to the Nagorny Karabakh president for political affairs, Manvel Sarkisyan, said in Yerevan today.

He noted that the cause of the military conflict was disagreement between Nagorny Karabakh and Azerbaijan and therefore "these sides must be responsible for the settlement".

"Another issue is that Armenia has rendered and is continuing to render military and financial assistance to Nagorny Karabakh," Manvel Sarkisyan said.

The NKR president's adviser said that for the first time in the past years, open discussion had been held in Armenia and Nagorny

Karabakh on the settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Manvel Sarkisyan also noted that various approaches to the problem only added to the political importance of this issue but did not promote a solution.

The NKR president's adviser expressed the opinion that the format of the current talks made a solution to the conflict predictable. "Nagorny Karabakh has the legal right to self-determination, which is reflected nowhere in the negotiation documents," he said.

10/24/03 – Karabakh President meets with OSCE chairman in office - RFE/RL Newsline

Arkadii Ghukasian, who is president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and his foreign minister Ashot Ghulian (whose name was spelled erroneously in "RFE/RL Newsline" on 22 October) met in Yerevan on 21 October with visiting Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairman in Office and Netherlands Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. Noyan Tapan reported on 23 October. The three men assessed the current stage of efforts to mediate a solution to the Karabakh conflict and the prospects of a resumption of hostilities between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces following the Azerbaijani presidential election, which Ghukasian considers unlikely. Ghukasian stressed his readiness to make a constructive contribution to resolving the conflict peacefully.

10/24/03 – Nagorno-Karabakh : police beat up, threaten Baptist and family – Forum 18 news service

A Baptist in Nagorno-Karabakh has been beaten up, threatened with mind-altering drugs and had threats against his wife, for distributing religious literature on the street. At the same time his local church had all its religious literature confiscated. Police claim this is legal under martial law, which amongst other restrictions on civil liberties bans the activity of "religious sects and unregistered organisations". However a senior Nagorno-Karabakh representative has claimed to Forum 18 that martial law restrictions have ended and that "There are no restrictions

on the activity of any religious communities". Other Protestants, Pentecostals, Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses have also all faced restrictions on their activity which still continue. At the same time the Armenian Apostolic Church has become the de facto state religion.

10/29/03 – 8 blown up on mines in Nagorno Karabakh this year - PanArmenian News

Within the 9 months of this year 8 cases of being blown up on mines and ammunition with lethal outcome were registered in the territory of Nagorno Karabakh. As reported by "Arminfo" agency, during the years of war against the Azeri military over 15 hectares of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR) territory were mined.

"The HALO Trust" British non-governmental organization, which works there since 2000, much contributes to the Karabakh party in discovery and neutralization of mines. According to the estimates of British sappers, some 10 thousand units of unexploded ammunition remain in the territory of NKR.

***INGUSHETIA /
INGOUCHIE***

10/15/03 – Ingush President sees no need to reunite with Chechnya - RFE/RL

Murat Zyazikov told journalists in Moscow on 13 October that he sees no need to restore the Checheno-Ingush Republic, which split into its two constituent parts in the summer of 1992, Interfax reported. Chechen President-elect Kadyrov referred during his 10 October press conference to the possibility of such a merger. Zyazikov, however, argued that a merger would not be economically viable, as both republics require major subsidies from the federal center. He compared Chechnya and Ingushetia to "two brothers...each of whom should have his own house".

10/23/03 – Former Ingush President says Kremlin behind proposal to merge Chechnya, Ingushetia - RFE/RL

In an interview published in "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 23 October, Ruslan Aushev claimed that Moscow is behind the proposal aired on 10 October by Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov to merge Chechnya and Ingushetia into a single federation subject. Aushev pointed out that the Russian leadership has for some time argued the need to reduce the number of Russian regions, and that merging Chechnya and Ingushetia and giving the new formation a different name -- possibly "the Vainakh Republic" -- would "dissolve" an unstable region in a more stable one, and obviate the need to use the term "Chechnya." The need to persuade Chechen displaced persons still in Ingushetia to return to Chechnya would also disappear. Given that Ingushetia has an impressive new capital -- Aushev's achievement -- there would be no need to rebuild Grozny, Aushev concluded. Aushev's successor, President Murat Zyazikov, has rejected the idea of reuniting the two regions, which were created by the split in the summer of 1992 of the former Checheno-Ingush ASSR.

***SOUTH RUSSIA/
RUSSIE DU SUD***

10/06/03 – Putin defends rights of Meskhetians to leave Russia - RFE/RL

During a meeting with representatives of the Cossack community and World War II veterans in Krasnodar Krai on 3 October, President Putin said that Meskhetians have the right to return to their historic homeland and that this question has been raised with the leadership of Georgia more than once, RIA-Novosti reported. However, Georgia's leadership "is not still ready to resolve this problem," Putin said. Putin added that while the "Meskhetian-Turks are living in Russia, they should live

normally, observing our laws." Some 13,000 Meskhetians who live in Krasnodar Krai have been refused even temporary registration since October 2001. They also do not have the right to register their children and cannot lease land, which makes it difficult for them to survive since they are primarily agricultural workers, newsru.com reported on 3 October.

10/06/03 – Georgian President reaffirms commitment to Meskhetian repatriation - RFE/RL

Responding to recent comments by Russian President Vladimir Putin during a visit to Krasnodar Krai, President Shevardnadze explained at a press briefing on 6 October that due to the unresolved Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts, Georgia cannot at present accept those Meskhetians who want to resettle in Georgia from Russia, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. But he added that Tbilisi will try to resolve the problem gradually, noting at the same time that many Meskhetians do not wish to settle in Georgia because of the country's social and economic problems. When Georgia became a full member of the Council of Europe in 1999, it undertook to allow all Meskhetians who wish to do so to settle in Georgia by 2010.

10/17/03 – Ukrainians reportedly bring heavy machinery to stop Russian dam project - RFE/RL

The row between Kyiv and Moscow over a Russian dam project in the Kerch Strait flared up on 16 October after Ukrainian authorities dispatched several dozen border guards, bulldozers, and excavators to the islet of Tuzla to halt the Russian project's advance on Ukrainian territory. "You are close to the borders of sovereign Ukraine. Halt!" reads a sign on the Tuzla coast facing the builders of the dam, who are reportedly less than 1 kilometer from the island. Aleksander Tkachev, governor of Russia's Krasnodar Krai, said construction will be stopped at a distance of 600 meters from the island. Despite that assurance, Ukraine sent a dredger and a seaborne crane to the area and marked a division line in the Kerch

Strait with buoys. According to Krasnodar Krai authorities, the dike is essential to protect the Russian coast in the area from being washed away by the sea.

10/23/03 – Putin orders temporary halt to controversial dam project - RFE/RL

Presidential spokesman Aleksei Gromov announced on 23 October that President Putin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma have spoken by telephone and have agreed that the two countries' prime ministers will meet on 24 October to discuss the conflict over a controversial dam being built by Russia in the Kerch Strait. Putin will ask the administration of Krasnodar Krai to halt construction of the dam until the dispute with Kyiv is resolved. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said on 22 October that the project is dictated "exclusively by economic and ecological considerations and has nothing to do with Ukrainian-Russian talks about border delimitation in the Azov Sea," RTR reported.

JAVAKHK / DJAVAKHK

10/08/03 – Armenian leader, Georgian envoy discuss Armenian-populated region - Arminfo News

Armenian President Robert Kocharyan and the plenipotentiary representative of the Georgian president in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, Gela Kvarakhtselia, today discussed prospects for developing Armenian-Georgian relations, as well as the socioeconomic situation and cultural problems of the Georgian region of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

The presidential press service told Arminfo news agency that the Georgian delegation had briefed the Armenian president on the election situation in Georgia. Moreover, the Georgian delegation told Robert Kocharyan that an agreement had been reached with Armenia's energy workers on settling the issue of supplying power to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

The participants in the meeting discussed prospects for building a road to connect the district centre of Akhalkalaki with the Armenian

border. The Georgian guests pointed out that during the visit, they were surprised and stunned by the scale of road construction and volume of capital construction in Armenia.

10/10/03 – Manifestation contre le trajet de l'oléoduc - A – INFO

Le 9 octobre, les habitants du village de Khana ont organisé une action de protestation, et ont bloqué le carrefour principal d'Akhaltskha. D'après les témoignages des représentants des manifestants, la population se sent flouée car jusqu'à la décision du tracé du pipeline les représentants de BP avaient connaissance des deux exigences des riverains : à savoir, qu'en cas de maintien du tracé de l'oléoduc la construction du village deviendrait impossible, et que pour la rendre possible, le tracé devrait changer. Les représentants de la BP ont choisi une troisième solution : celle de maintenir et le tracé de l'oléoduc et continuer la construction du village.

Les habitants du village de Khana, refusant la proposition de la BP exigent que cette dernière choisisse l'une des solutions. Au cas où le tracé serait maintenu, les villageois exigeraient des indemnités leur permettant de construire des maisons ailleurs, compte tenu des conséquences écologiques néfastes de l'oléoduc sur l'habitat.

Lors d'une rencontre avec les habitants, le directeur de la compagnie BP a conseillé de ne plus recommencer ce type d'actions car, dit-il, selon les nouveaux accords, pour toute heure de manifestation, l'état devra payer une indemnité de 15 000 \$ à sa Compagnie. Il a également demandé de constituer un document qui lui permettrait de défendre les intérêts des villageois de Khana auprès des autres compagnies de construction de l'oléoduc.

11/10/03 – Pendant l'année scolaire courante deux nouvelles écoles se sont écroulées au Djavakhk - A-INFO

En effet, le bâtiment du collège numéro 2 de Diliska du district d'Akhalkalak s'est entièrement écroulé, et les cours ont été transférés à l'école numéro 1 du village, en alternance journalière

avec deux autres cycles. Et voilà que le bâtiment du collège numéro 1 « Vahan Terian » de Gandza du district de Ninotsminda, considéré longtemps comme dangereux s'est partiellement écroulé. Afin de continuer l'année scolaire, les cours continuent d'être dispensés en plusieurs cycles journaliers dans la partie de l'école qui reste sauve.

[...] L'union éducative arménienne des Etats Unis a entrepris les travaux de rénovation du collège de Dalama, l'unique village arménien du district d'Aspindza. Rappelons que Mercy Corps avait précédemment pris en charge les rénovations, mais la totalité du bâtiment n'avait pas été remis en état. Selon le directeur de l'école, V. Torossian, les moyens apportés par l'Union culturelle arménienne seront suffisants pour la réhabilitation totale de la bâtisse.

10/18/03 - 17 ethnic Armenian citizens to stand in parliamentary elections - Kavkasia-Press news agency

The Central Electoral Commission [of Georgia] has approved the final list of the parties [and blocs] that will take part in the 2 November parliamentary elections. The number of ethnic Armenians on the proportional [party] lists is quite small.

The electoral list of the pro-government For a New Georgia bloc contains the names of Arnold Stepanyan (No 54), Givi Shugharov (No 59) and Aleksandre Movsesyan (No 108). Revival's party list contains the names of Armen Gevorkyan (No 40) and Sasha Aleksanyan (No 55). Among the candidates standing in the elections on the proportional lists, Melik Raisyan (No 24) and Genrikh Muradyan (No 29) of The Burjanadze-Democrats bloc have the most realistic chances.

As regards the candidates in single-seat constituencies, [the incumbent] MP Enzel Mkoyan and Kolia Grigoryan are registered as candidates in Ninotsminda constituency. In Akhalkalaki constituency, Hamlet Shakhbekyan (the pro-government bloc), Hamlet Movsesyan (the Burjanadze-Democrats bloc) and Maruzhan Ezoyan (Industry Will Save Georgia) will run for the parliamentary seat. In Tsalka constituency, groups of supporters

have nominated Aik Meltonyan, [MP] Van Baiburt, Armen Karagezyan and Agasi Gevorkyan. Finally, Revival has nominated Sergey Karoyan in Akhaltsikhe constituency.

10/22/03 - Georgia's pro-government bloc pushes away Armenians - YERKIR Online

Armenians of Tbilisi, who traditionally supported the pro-government forces, will be voting for the opposition Burjanadze-Democrats bloc, experts say. The A-Info agency, citing the list of the pro-government For New Georgia bloc, concludes that the considerably large Armenian community of Georgia is hardly represented in it, while many ethnic Azeris have been included.

The first Armenian encountered in the list is Arnold Stepanian, on the 54th position, while two Azeris, Mubaras Karayev and Davit Akhmetov are on 38th and 50th places respectively. Between Givi Shugarov, 60th and Alexander Movsisian, 108th, there are seven Azeris; Karakhan Khalilov, 78th, Izumrut Ghumbarov, 78th, Mamed Yasubov, 85th, Rasul Hasanov, 95th, Dinat Gulmamedov, 96th, Kamir Musaev, 100th, and Jhangir Orujev, 102nd. It is notable that while Armenians are the second ethnic group in Georgia after the Georgians, Osetian Gocha Zasokhov and Russian Nunu Ovsannikova are ahead of the Armenians, on the 44th and 45th positions respectively. So, it makes sense that the Armenians are not happy, and according to the A-Info agency, this "unhappiness may pass to the Georgian regions populated with Armenians, who are represented in the list just symbolically."

Tbilisi Armenians are also sensitive about Van Baiburadian's non-including in the list. Baiburadian is the most outspoken Armenian member of the Georgian parliament and the editor of the Armenian language newspaper in Tbilisi.

10/24/03 - Armenian, Georgian national security chiefs meet in Akhalkalak - AZG Daily

October 23 Armenian National Security Service chief Karlos Petrosyan and Georgian national

security minister Avtandil Khaburdzina had a meeting in Akhalkalak, an Armenian populated southern Georgian province.

The sides first had a closed-door meeting at the Akhalkalak administrative building, after which an enlarged meeting was held, with participation of local administration members, Armenian officials, local community members and press.

Akhalkalaki Armenians raised the issue of reconstructing the Bavra-Ninotsminda highway by the support of Armenian state. The local Armenian also complained to the Armenian national security head about the Javakhk-Turkey Border's poor protection, as well as the insulting attitude of some top Georgian officials towards the local Armenians.

Citing reliable sources, Javakhk-based A-info news agency informs that the major aim of the security officials meeting was the exclusion of any disorders or aggressions in the Armenian populated Akhalkalak during and after the Georgian parliamentary elections.

DOCUMENTS

Freedom of expression, free media and information

Statement of Mr. Ronald McNamara

U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

Mr. Moderator, the United States commends the meeting last December of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and their subsequent Joint Declaration. The Declaration not only reaffirmed commitments to what many consider traditional forms of speech, but also stated clearly:

"Criminal defamation is not a justifiable restriction on freedom of expression; all criminal defamation laws should be abolished and replaced, where necessary, with appropriate civil defamation laws."

The United States has long sought that such a standard be applied at

least throughout the OSCE region, if not world wide. We appreciate their forthright statement of this principle.

In that connection, we welcome the government-proposed changes to the Romanian Penal Code that would abolish criminal defamation and insult laws, and we hope the parliament will quickly pass this proposal into law. As the Romanian Government has rightly recognized, civil codes can provide adequate protection against defamation. We join the OSCE Office in Yerevan in urging Armenia to follow the example being set by Romania and repeal its criminal defamation and insult laws. We also share the concerns raised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media regarding the one-year prison sentence imposed on Russian journalist German Galkin for libel and slander.

Unfortunately, despite some positive efforts and the vast resources and energy that have been spent to develop free media and protect journalists, we would have to agree with Mr. Duve's statement earlier this year that the situation of free media in the OSCE region has deteriorated in recent years. The following examples illustrate the reasons for our increasing concern.

The United States is dismayed that the Lukashenko regime in Belarus continues to strangle media freedoms. In the latest example of Belarus' assault on media freedoms, the Belarusian authorities denied an entry visa to Freimut Duve, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. This builds on a pattern of growing harassment and hostility toward the media by the Lukashenko regime. In July, the U.S.-based NGO, IREX, closed its Belarusian operations when the authorities refused to renew its accreditation on the grounds that IREX was funding opposition media. I would also note that, over the course of the last four months, there have been further restrictions imposed on the independent media, with the suspensions of independent newspapers *Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, its periodic attachment, *BDG--For Internal Use Only*, *Navinki*, *Ekho* and *Predprinimatelskaya Gazeta*. The offices of the trade union paper

Solidarnost were also sealed by the authorities.

We are concerned about the current negative trends and restrictive practices with respect to media freedom in Ukraine, including the use of explicit directives or "temnyky," sent from President Kuchma's Presidential Administration to editors on what subjects to cover and in what manner. Lack of compliance with international human rights standards, including OSCE commitments, on freedom of expression undermines Ukraine's attempts at Euro-Atlantic integration. Mr. Moderator, an independent media free from governmental pressure is an essential factor in ensuring a level playing field in the lead up to the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine.

In her April 18, 2003 annual report to the Ukrainian parliament, Ombudsman Nina Karpachova asserted that journalism remains among the most dangerous professions in Ukraine, with 36 media employees having been killed over the past ten years, while beatings, intimidation of media employees, freezing of bank accounts of media outlets, and confiscation of entire print runs of newspapers and other publications have become commonplace.

We are concerned about the ongoing case of Turkish journalist Hasan Özgün. After serving a nine-year prison term, Özgün was released last April and was immediately charged with "insulting state institutions" under Article 159 of the Criminal Code. Conviction could carry a 12-year jail term.

We remain extremely concerned about the ongoing crackdown on freedom of expression and free media in Central Asia. Unfortunately, Turkmenistan has made no progress whatsoever toward a freer media or permitting the expression of any dissenting thought. The "Betrayers of the Motherland" decree makes it a crime to disagree with the policies of the president. There is no freedom of media at all; all media is tightly state controlled. Internet access is limited, and we have credible reports that Radio Liberty is

jammed in parts of the country. Uzbekistan, despite the formal lifting of censorship, continues to maintain the tightest control of the media and attempts to pursue independent journalism remain dangerous. In Tashkent, on August 28, human rights activist Surat Ikramov, who hopes to establish an association of independent journalists, was abducted and badly beaten. Most recently, direct access to the *Ozod Ovoz* web site has reportedly been closed since September 2, 2003, and the authorities blocked access to the opposition *Birlik* and *Erk* web pages in May.

Even in those Central Asian states which tolerate any opposition or independent thought, electronic media remain largely in state hands or carefully apolitical, while print media labors under strict restrictions and ever present threat of intimidation. Especially risky are attempts to shine the spotlight on high-level corruption.

In Kazakhstan, journalist Sergei Duvanov remains in jail after his conviction on charges that experts working under OSCE auspices have described as politically motivated. This view is shared by human rights organizations all over the world.

Independent and opposition media in Kyrgyzstan have been hobbled, and even put out of business, by a series of slander lawsuits brought by officials. We call on Kyrgyzstan to decriminalize libel, so that officials cannot use the courts to stifle investigations into corruption.

Freedom of the media is more highly developed in the Caucasus, but concerns remain. In Georgia, we have received reports about renewed official pressure on the independent *Rustavi-2* TV station, against the backdrop of the upcoming November parliamentary election. *Rustavi-2* is one of the most important achievements of Georgian democracy and progress towards an open society - any threat to its functioning is certain to rally its defenders inside Georgia, in Washington and in other OSCE capitals.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has expressed concerns about the situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Armenia, A1+ and Noyan Tapan

remain off the air, after failed efforts to win tenders for broadcast licenses that were widely seen as politically driven. As for Azerbaijan, on September 10, 2003, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media jointly stated that "We are deeply concerned by the continuous reports regarding harassment of the media and intimidation of journalists in Azerbaijan." They noted specifically that the problems faced by the newspaper Yeni Musavat, which "has been sentenced to three fines amounting in total to 100,000 US Dollars and whose bank account has been frozen."

And lastly, we would like to thank Mr. Freimut Duve for his steadfast efforts over the past six years in developing the office of Representative on Freedom of the Media. While Mr. Duve started out with little in the way of resources, over time he built an office that should be able to work constructively to protect one of our most cherished freedoms.

10/14/03 – Who has crimped the Armenian patriarche ? - Pan Armenian Network

The leader of the Constantinople diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church is in dependence from the Turkish special services.

Even the desire of the Turks to become members of the European Union did not oblige official Ankara to give up the policy aimed at humiliation of the rights of the ethnical religious minorities. The Turkish authorities pay special attention to the Constantinople diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church and its leader, the Archbishop Mesrop Mutafyan. The Armenian Patriarch, concerned with the fate of its compatriots, has become a hostage in the hands of the Turkish special services. However, it did not help the few Armenians that still continue to live in Turkey.

Mesrop II became the head of the Constantinople diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church after the approval of the Turkish government which for a long time was impeding the elections of Patriarch. Ankara sanctioned it only when the special

services made Mesrop Mutafyan depend from them. Now with the help of the Archbishop the Turkish authorities each time deny the facts of using pressure over the ethnical minorities or use him in their struggle against the campaign on international recognition of the 1915 Genocide. Last week it was thanks to the attempts of Archbishop that the Turks managed to avoid serious problems connected with non fulfillment of the commitments undertaken in front of the EU. Leaders of Christian minorities of the country prepared a message addressed to the leadership of the European Union asking them to oblige the Turkish authorities give up the pressure on national minorities.

However, Mesrop II did his best so that the letter did not reach Brussels. Thanks to him the document was sent not to the European Commission but to the Parliament of Turkey and Governmental bodies.

This was not the first time when the Archbishop demonstrates a strange behavior caused by a pressure from Ankara. Once he even protested against the fact that the Vatican was recognizing the Armenian genocide. In November 2000 he not only refused to take part in the meeting between the Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II and Holy Pontiff Johann Paul II, but also condemned 2 spiritual leaders who adopted a joint communiqué mentioning about the Genocide. Then he lied to the Europeans that there were no problems of ethnical minorities in Turkey.

It would be easier to justify him if in exchange the Turkish party also made some concessions. But it is evident that the official Ankara is not going to soften his discriminating policy towards Armenians. Recently the Turks thanked very strangely the service of Mesrop II who managed to prevent the sending of message of the Christian minorities to the European Union. Few days later the special services prohibited him to make a pastoral visit to the monastery of Akhtamar. This did not remain unnoticed. On October 6th the newly appointed Ambassador of the USA to Ankara suggested the Patriarch to meet and discuss the situation with the rights

of the Armenian community. Most probably this was caused by the fact of the visit to Van which did not take place. It is difficult to judge the sincerity of the Patriarch during the conversation with the American Diplomat. Armenia being in tense relationship with Turkey is not able to defend the rights of Turkish citizens of Armenian origins. In these conditions the United States and Europe must not remain indifferent to the fate of the small Armenian community which has survived from the horrific genocide organized by the Turkish government. The Western world has to make Ankara give up the discriminating policy conducted towards the Armenian minority.

10/20/03 - Comment & Analysis; Country Profile; Statistics; Forecast;— PanArmenian News

Armenia experienced mixed fortunes in 2002 and the first half of 2003. The country joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2002, raising hopes of better economic performance. Political instability increased after the hotly disputed presidential elections in March 2003, and there were reports of political rights violations. Elections in the neighbouring Nagorno-Karabakh enclave increased tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Free vote?

The build up to the 19 February 2003 presidential election began in 2002. A fragmented opposition gave the incumbent president, Robert Kocharian, the best chance of winning. The major pre-election challenger for the presidency was the former foreign minister, Raffi Hovannisian, who was born in the US. However, Hovannisian's candidacy was eliminated on the grounds that he did not satisfy the 10-year Armenian citizenship requirement. Hovannisian had requested that his Armenian citizenship be dated from 1991 when he first applied for it, rather than 2001 when it was finally granted.

Kocharian appointed the defence minister, Serge Sarkissian, as his campaign manager and it was expected that he would win the elections in the first round.

However, when the official results were announced, it was clear that the race was not going to be as easy as planned: Kocharian won 48.3 per cent of the votes, Stepan Demirchian (the son of Armenia's former Communist leader, Karen Demirchian) won 27.4 per cent and Artashes Geghamyan won 16.9 per cent. In the run-off election on 5 March 2003, Kocharian won with 67.5 per cent of the vote amid reports of mass electoral fraud, including ballot rigging. The elections, which were monitored by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) observers, fell short of internationally accepted election norms. Sarkissian dismissed the criticism, based on findings by CIS observers which were not as negative as those of the OSCE's. Sarkissian commented that 'Westerners did not understand post-Soviet mentality and elections'.

By late March 2003, the opposition was still demanding a recount and even new elections.

The presidential elections have created a deep rift in an already divided political system and overshadowed the 25 May 2003 parliamentary elections when the Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun (HHK) (Republican Party of Armenia) emerged as the largest party in the 131-member Azgayin Zhoghov (National Assembly), after winning 23.5 per cent of the vote and 35 seats. The HHK, the Orinants Erkir (OE) (Rule of Law Country) - which won 18 seats - and the Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun (Dashnaktsutiun) (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) - which won 11 seats - formed a coalition government after the election.

While international observers said that the ballot process improved during the election, there were still serious problems. Opposition parties again alleged electoral fraud. After coming second in the election with 13.6 per cent of the vote and 17 seats, the Ardartyun (Justice) alliance said that it did not accept the results and would 'continue to

fight for the establishment of a real democracy in Armenia'.

A constitutional referendum was held on the same day as the parliamentary elections and was seen as more important than the election itself. The referendum was held to approve major changes to the constitution to give the National Assembly greater ability to scrutinise the president. However, the result was insufficient to allow the constitutional amendments to take place with only 42 per cent of the electorate approving the amendments.

Regional issues

Armenia's foreign policy is a balancing act between neighbours who do not necessarily get along. The thorniest issue is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which involves Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenia and Armenians demand that Turkey recognises the Armenian genocide of 1915. Turkey, fearing territorial demands, refuses to do so. Both sides appeared to be keen to find a compromise and to normalise their relations at the Black Sea Economic Co-operation meetings in Turkey.

Another major regional power, Iran, has maintained close ties with Armenia since the 1990s and has taken a neutral stand in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is widely believed that both countries share a common interest in limiting Turkey's presence in the region. Armenia's warm relations with Iran raised concerns in the US, which considers Iran to be part of an 'axis of evil'.

Media's disappearing acts

There were two blows to freedom of speech in 2002. In April 2002, the government revoked the licences of two independent television broadcasting companies, A-One Plus and Noyan Tapan. This was seen as an attempt by the government to silence the media ahead of the presidential elections. In revoking of the two broadcast outlets, Armenia was left with no major independent news broadcast service.

Then in the December 2002, Dikran Naghdalian, the head of the state-

run Armenian Public Television and Radio (APTR), was assassinated. Naghdalian was well known for his pro-Kocharian views and his harsh criticism of the president's opponents. He was the first journalist to be assassinated in Armenia.

WTO member at last

Armenia joined the WTO on 11 December 2002. Membership had long been anticipated and came after a delay in 2001, when the WTO complained about Armenia's slow legislative reforms. Subsequently, the National Assembly passed a number of laws bringing the country into compliance with WTO rules on access of foreign goods and services to the Armenian market. WTO membership will boost Armenia's growing economy, although many observers are weary that the country's agriculture sector will be disadvantaged vis-a-vis its WTO partners in the long-term.

Debt and privatisation

After a year of negotiations, the government finally signed an agreement in July 2002 to settle Armenia's US \$ 98 million debt to Russia. Although the debt constituted only about 10 per cent of Armenia's foreign debt, interest payable on the Russian debt was at a higher rate than the loans that Armenia had from international institutions. The agreement, characterised as 'assets for debt', gave five state-owned businesses to Russia in return for Russia's scrapping the debt. The most important of these businesses was the Hrazdan thermal power plant, which needs major renovation. The deal will make Russia an even more important player in Armenia and could allow Russia to exercise more control over Armenia. The other four transferred businesses included several Soviet-era military research centres.

Economic growth

Landlocked, and without any significant natural resources, Armenia's economic development is a difficult challenge. Despite having

one of the most liberal legislative frameworks among the states of the former Soviet Union, the major challenges within the Armenian economy are corruption and emigration.

GDP grew by 12.9 per cent in 2002 and inflation was 1.1 per cent. Budget revenues totalled US \$ 340 million, with 50 per cent coming from tax collection - demonstrating that Armenia has a strong tax collection system. Despite a strong economic performance, the unemployment figure was 9.7 per cent in 2002. Due to economic hardship and unemployment, particularly in the major cities, about 800,000 people (close to 20 per cent of the overall population) have left the country since 1991 in search of jobs overseas.

Russia remains Armenia's main trading partner with increased energy exports and economic investment. Armenia's exports to Russia have increased in recent years. Most exports came from Armenian companies, although there has been an increase of exports by foreign companies operating in Armenia - something that Armenia has been trying to promote to increase foreign investment.

In June 2002, Iran and Armenia signed an agreement which would increase seasonal electricity exchange between them. Armenia imports electricity from Iran in the winter when its hydroelectric power plants are non-operational, while Iran is usually short of energy during the summer.

The two countries also agreed to start the construction of a 140km gas pipeline. The US \$ 120 million project is planned to transfer natural gas from Turkmenistan and Iran to Armenia. Armenia regards this deal as very important as it will lessen the country's reliance on Russian gas.

Outlook

Armenia is still not an investor friendly country. The country's disputed presidential elections and the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continue to scare off many foreign investors. However, the elimination of debt owed to Russia

will release more money for the government to undertake further economic reforms. WTO membership, liberal economic and trade legislation, and the ongoing privatisation of state-owned businesses, should eventually lead to Armenia's economic recovery and development.

10/28/03 - Violent repression in the post-electoral context - International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)- Press Release

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) remains extremely preoccupied by the violent and repressive post-electoral situation in Azerbaijan.

The FIDH has already denounced the numerous irregularities which marred the presidential election, as well as the use of excessive violence against opposition demonstrators by security forces, on October 15 and 16. The OSCE and the Council of Europe immediately condemned the violations of these basic political and civil rights.

The FIDH has observed a serious degradation of the local situation since then. A large number of opposition party leaders and activists, as well as those election officials, who refused to sign the results in their polling stations or districts, were detained throughout the country. In a list distributed on October 25, the Federation of Human Rights Organisations of Azerbaijan (FHROA) names 338 arrested and 13 missing persons. The information on arrested, disappeared and severely beaten people continues to grow. According to FHROA information, most persons are arrested by administrative order and jailed up to 15 days but some of them were informed that they will face a criminal accusation.

According to local legislation, all the protocols of polling stations should be presented to the Central election committee within two weeks, from where they are directed to the Constitutional Court. In order to get these protocols collected by any means, police started to arrest the election officials and force them to sign the papers. Some parties even

denounced through the news agency «Turan» the falsifications of the signatures. Some prominent members of opposition parties were arrested, such as the Vice-President of the main opposition party «Musavat» and the chief of the Musavat's electoral headquarters Mr. Arif Gadzhily, the leader of Umid Party, Mr. Igbal Agazade, and others. The Police also tried to arrest in his flat Mr. Ajdyn Aliev, a member of the National Front of Azerbaijan, but he refused to open the door and threatened the police to jump out of the window in case they broke in. The incident ended only after the intervention of the representatives of the OSCE and US Embassy.

The ad hoc Crisis Centre established by FHROA has received a lot of information about numerous instances of tortures and ill-treatment. The arrested people are kept in detention in the organised crime department in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan. It is also worth mentioning that lawyers are not allowed in the premises.

On 20 October, several TV channels broadcasted the message of Mr. Igbal Agazade, the arrested leader of the Umid party, who accused the leader of Musavat party of having organised and directed «the dramatic events of 15-16 October» after the presidential election. It was quite obvious that Mr. Agazade had suffered physical ill-treatment and pressure before making his declaration.

The pro-governmental TV channels also broadcasted hate speeches against the opposition, appealing for the closure down of opposition media and political parties, arrests and various punishments of their activists, as well as sanctions against human rights defenders (See Urgent Appeal AZ 001/1003/OBS 058 of the Observatory for the protection of Human Rights Defenders – a joint programme of the FIDH and the OMCT).

Moreover, according to the Azerbaijan Journalists Confederation (AJK) and the Azerbaijan Committee to protect Journalists (RUH), on 15 and 16

October, 50 journalists were beaten up – sometimes very seriously – 10 were detained or arrested, six were prevented from gathering information and the cameras of six others were broken – as of 23 October, one was also missing. The journalists were attacked or arrested when present at polling stations or when covering opposition demonstrations.

As early as October 16 the offices of the opposition daily Yeni Musavat were taken over by special forces and staff members were forced to leave the buildings. On 27 October, the Nasimi district court of Baku issued an order of arrest against Rauf Arifoglu, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, who is accused of "resisting police", "inciting public disorder" and "taking part in disordered activities". Moreover, groups of unidentified men in civilian clothes confiscated more than 20 000 copies of opposition newspapers.

The FIDH recalls that one of the conditions for Azerbaijan to get the status of member of Council of Europe - as adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe on 28 June 2000 - was "to revise legislation on elections [...] so that their results can be accepted by the majority of the political parties that will participate in the elections, and can be considered as free and fair by international observers». Besides, Azerbaijan had to «guarantee freedom of expression and the independence of the media and journalists, and particularly to exclude the use of administrative measures to restrict the freedom of the media».

The FIDH deeply regrets that Azerbaijan, who became a member of Council of Europe on 25 January 2001, did not meet any of these obligations. Far from establishing democracy and the Rule of law, Azerbaijan continues to crackdown the opposition and to destroy the previous democratic achievements with a rare violence. Therefore, the FIDH urges once again the international community, in particular the European Union, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, to use political and diplomatic pressure on the authorities, so that

they conform with international and regional human rights standards.

The FIDH calls the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to organise and to send an urgent investigative mission to Azerbaijan. That envoy would collect and study all violations of political and civil rights that occurred during the presidential election. It should also meet with the highest authorities of Azerbaijan. The FIDH urges the new President of Azerbaijan to immediately stop any kind of repression and violence against opposition activists, journalists and human rights defenders and to conform with human rights standards Azerbaijan accepted to respect when notably joining the Council of Europe. The new authorities will indeed be judged in view of their capacity to put a pacific end to the current crisis and to establish democratic practices and the Rule of law in the country.

10/31/03 – Cia confirms Armenian ownership of Karabagh and lands in Turkey - AZG Armenian Daily

The Central Intelligence Agency publishes each year a report called "World Factbook" which contains comprehensive information on the geography, population, government, economy, communications, transportation, and the military of more than 200 countries and territories. The Factbook can also be read on CIA's web site:
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/am.html>.

Even though no secrets are disclosed in this public document, it is still interesting to see how the CIA presents certain facts and issues regarding Armenia, Karabagh, Azerbaijan, and Turkey.

In the chapter on Armenia, the Factbook provides the following "background" information: "Armenia prides itself on being the first nation to formally adopt Christianity (early 4th century).

Despite periods of autonomy, over the centuries Armenia came under the sway of various empires including the Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Persian, and Ottoman. It was incorporated into

Russia in 1828 and the USSR in 1920. Armenian leaders remain preoccupied by the long conflict with Muslim Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, a primarily Armenian-populated region, assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s by Moscow. Armenia and Azerbaijan began fighting over the area in 1988; the struggle escalated after both countries attained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. By May 1994, when a cease-fire took hold, Armenian forces held not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also a significant portion of Azerbaijan proper. The economies of both sides have been hurt by their inability to make substantial progress toward a peaceful resolution."

It is interesting to note that the CIA devotes more than two-thirds of the "background" information on Armenia to Karabagh, indicating CIA's special attention to that region. By stating that Karabagh was "assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s by Moscow," the CIA is confirming the Armenian position that Karabagh was historically a part of Armenia. Finally, by referring to the territories surrounding Karabagh -- but not to Karabagh itself -- as "Azerbaijan proper," the CIA reinforces its acknowledgement that Karabagh is not part of Azerbaijan.

Even more interesting is the following paragraph under the title of "disputes": "Armenia supports ethnic Armenian secessionists in Nagorno-Karabakh and militarily occupies 16% of Azerbaijan. The above paragraph contains three false assertions: 1) Armenia does not occupy 16% of Azerbaijan. Karabagh Armenians (with support from Armenia) liberated themselves from the tyranny of Azerbaijan; 2) the Armenians of Karabagh are not "secessionists." They seek self-determination -- a right recognized by the United Nations; and 3) Contrary to the CIA's assertion (which were also made in the earlier editions of the "World Factbook") Armenian demands for their historic lands from Turkey have not "subsided." The Treaty of Sevres recognized the territories occupied by Turkey as Armenian lands. The borders of a much larger Armenia were drawn by President Woodrow

Wilson. It is comforting that the CIA acknowledges that these territories did belong to Armenia by referring to them as "former Armenian lands in Turkey."

In another CIA document ("Resolving conflicts in the Caucasus and Moldova: perspectives on next steps), a distinguished panel of experts contradicted those who say that time is on Azerbaijan's side in the Karabagh conflict. The panel members made the following very interesting observations: "Some observers see substantial strengths in the Armenian position, since the Armenians occupy the territory and over time their possession may be consolidated in de facto terms. Although Azerbaijan has the economic advantage, economic indicators may not be a deciding factor for at least three reasons:

1) Azerbaijan's relative economic strength is also its vulnerability since the Armenians understand that another war will interfere with petroleum transport, undermine regional investment, and compromise Azerbaijan's economic momentum;

2) Many Armenians have concluded on the basis of their troubled history that they cannot safely reside in territory controlled by Azerbaijan, and they are consequently resolute;

3) Armenians are prepared to sustain high levels of suffering. The rhetoric of Azeri hard-liners may therefore accomplish little beyond reducing Armenian's capacity for compromise. One of the difficulties in the conflict is that both parties regard time as being on their side. In each case, this is a fallacy.

Yet it is difficult for either party to see around a long history of mutual grievance and mistrust."

Armenians should make it clear to the whole world that their demands for their historical lands in Turkey, Karabagh or elsewhere, are as valid as ever, and not "subsiding!"

By Harut Sassounian, Publisher,
The California Courier

INFORMATION

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