

Covcas Bulletin

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

RESUMES / SUMMARY NOTES

ARMENIE / ARMENIA

La formation d'une coalition regroupant les forces politiques de l'opposition non communiste, le 29 mars 1997, n'a pas été suivie pour le moment d'une mobilisation de la population arménienne, comme l'escomptaient leurs leaders, en se fondant sur le modèle des manifestations de Belgrade en Serbie. L'Alliance de l'entente nationale remet en cause les résultats des dernières élections présidentielles, qui avaient vu une courte victoire du président Lévon Ter Pétrossian sur Vazkèn Manoukian (Union Démocratique Nationale) soutenu par plusieurs partis d'opposition, notamment la FRA Dachnaksoutioun et l'Union pour l'Autodétermination Nationale. Les meetings organisés les 18 avril et le 13 juin, pour réclamer de nouvelles élections présidentielles et législatives n'ont cependant rassemblé que de 15 à 20 000 personnes. Des dissensions sont aussi apparues, avec notamment Parouïr Haïrikian qui conteste la direction du mouvement à Vazkèn Manoukian. A l'initiative du nouveau premier ministre, Robert Kotcharian, on note un assouplissement de la position du pouvoir vis-à-vis du Parti FRA Dachnaksoutioun, néanmoins toujours frappé d'une mesure d'interdiction depuis décembre 1994. La FRA s'est vu ainsi restitué le matériel saisi au moment de son interdiction, et a pu reprendre la publication d'un journal *Hayots Achkhar* (*Le Monde Arménien*). La nomination d'un nouveau procureur de la République a aussi amené une amélioration en ce qui concerne les différents procès politiques engagés contre des militants de l'opposition, notamment de la FRA.

Le parti au pouvoir, le MNA, est quant à lui traversé par des luttes internes, qui devraient éclater au grand jour lors de son prochain congrès en juillet.

Références : pp. 7-11.

AZERBAÏDJAN / AZERBAIJAN

Lopposition azerbaïdjanaise, malgré la forte pression des autorités, a commencé à s'organiser, dans l'optique des élections présidentielles de 1998. Une coalition de sept partis a en effet élu à sa tête l'ancien président Aboulfaz Eltchibey, ainsi qu'Isa Gambar, chef du parti Moussavat. Etabli dans son village natal du Nakhitchevan, A. Eltchibey n'envisage pas cependant un retour immédiat à Bakou, et subordonne sa participation aux prochaines élections à l'établissement de conditions démocratiques. Les craintes de l'ex-président sont fondées sur la politique répressive des autorités azéries. Celle-ci s'exprime par des procès contre le Parti Islamique d'Azerbaïdjan (pro-iranien - interdit), dont des militants ont été condamnés à de lourdes peines de prison, ou contre d'anciens dirigeants, considérés comme traîtres tels Iskander Hamidov (pro-turc, ancien ministre de l'intérieur d'A. Eltchibey) et l'ancien premier ministre Sourat Husseinov. L'Azerbaïdjan, selon le dernier rapport de Human Rights Watch, reste un pays où les droits de l'homme et les libertés politiques sont bafoués : mauvais traitements ou torture dans les prisons, procès entachés d'irrégularités, censure sur les medias, entrave aux fonctionnements des organisations des droits de l'homme.

Références : pp. 37-38.

HAUT-KARABAKH / NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Les négociations tripartites de Moscou, sous l'égide du Groupe de Minsk de l'OSCE, du 1er au 3 avril, n'ont donné, comme il fallait s'y attendre, aucun résultat probant, bien que l'épineuse question du statut du Karabakh ait été à peine évoquée. Les deux problèmes de Chouchi et du corridor de Latchine ont constitué les deux pierres d'achoppement des discussions : les parties arméniennes (Arménie et Karabakh) considérant ces territoires comme parties intégrantes du Haut-Karabakh et vitales pour sa sécurité, tandis que la partie azérie les revendiquait au même titre que les districts périphériques du Karabakh, avec un déploiement provisoire de forces de paix internationales. Une série d'incidents armés frontaliers entre l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan ont eu lieu tout au long du mois d'avril, dont les deux parties se sont rejeté la responsabilité l'un sur l'autre ; leur résultat cependant aura été de montrer la précarité du cessez-le-feu en vigueur depuis mai 1994, ce qui accrédite l'idée, défendue par Erevan, de provocations azéries, destinées à rompre le statu quo actuel. Les efforts des trois co-présidents français, américain et russe du Groupe de Minsk de l'OSCE, ont pris un tour décisif le 1er mai à Moscou avec la volonté de proposer une solution en commun pour le conflit du Haut-Karabakh. Deux missions ont conduit les co-présidents du Groupe de Minsk en Arménie, au Karabakh et en Azerbaïdjan, au cours du mois de juin, afin de soumettre un nouveau plan de paix. Les

réponses des différentes parties restent pour le moment confidentielles, mais la teneur du plan a été en partie divulguée, notamment par l'Azerbaïdjan. Ce plan, en effet, rejoint les préoccupations de Bakou, pour le contrôle de Latchine et de Chouchi, et n'accorde qu'un statut d'autonomie pour le Karabakh. Le 20 juin, venant appuyer cette initiative, les présidents Chirac, Clinton et Eltsine ont fait une déclaration commune en faveur d'un « règlement immédiat » du conflit, au Sommet du G8 à Denver. L'Arménie et le Haut-Karabakh apparaissent de plus en plus isolés face à la pression internationale. Références : pp. 2, 19-27.

RUSSIE / RUSSIA

La signature le 12 mai à Moscou, par les présidents russe et tchéchène, Boris Eltsine et Aslan Maskhadov, d'un traité « sur la paix et les principes des relations russo-tchéchènes » a marqué la fin des longues négociations entamées depuis août 1996 : sans aborder la question du statut de la république, considérée par la Russie comme partie intégrante de son territoire et par les Tchétchènes comme une entité indépendante, le traité met définitivement fin à la guerre et exprime le rejet des deux parties de l'usage de la force. Le traité affirme aussi l'établissement de relations « égales et solides » entre la Fédération de Russie et la Tchétchénie. Il a été suivi de différents accords économiques et surtout, le 13 juin, d'un memorandum sur le transit du pétrole azéri vers la Russie via le territoire tchéchène. Selon le secrétaire du Conseil de Sécurité russe, Ivan Rybkine, acteur principal des négociations, c'est l'une des raisons qui ont motivé la signature du traité russo-tchéchène. Moscou aurait aussi été motivé par la volonté de renforcer l'autorité du président tchéchène, jugé comme un modéré, face aux débordements des forces radicales, tel le commandant Raduev, auteur d'opérations terroristes en Russie. Références : pp. 27-32.

ANALYSE / ANALYSIS

07/03/1997 - Le Haut-Karabakh ou le sens des principes - Covcas Center:

Par Jean-Noël Kouyoumdjian

Les développements actuels du processus de paix du Haut-Karabakh sont aujourd'hui la conséquence directe des décisions du Sommet de Lisbonne de l'OSCE de décembre 1996. En plaçant l'intégrité territoriale des Etats au-dessus des autres principes fondateurs de la Conférence sur la Sécurité et la Coopération en Europe, notamment le droit à l'autodétermination, les pays membres ont pris une décision politique, en contradiction avec l'Acte final d'Helsinki. Ce dernier en effet exclut toute hiérarchie ou prééminence entre les différents principes énoncés.

Ainsi l'OSCE a donné satisfaction à un Etat membre, l'Azerbaïdjan, par rapport à une population usant de son droit légitime à l'autodétermination. La Conférence de Minsk, qui selon la décision du Conseil des ministres de l'OSCE, en 1992, devait décider le statut du Haut-Karabagh, après la conclusion d'un accord politique, n'a de fait plus lieu d'être, puisque l'OSCE a déjà décidé le principe de la « définition du statut légal du Nagorny-Karabakh dans un accord fondé sur l'autodétermination, qui confère au Nagorny-Karabakh le plus haut degré d'autonomie à l'intérieur de l'Azerbaïdjan » (Déclaration du président en exercice de l'OSCE, Document de Lisbonne, Annexe 1, 1996).

Le Conseil de l'Europe, le 22 avril 1997, a abondé dans le même sens, dans sa *Résolution 1119 relative aux conflits en Transcaucasie*. Celle-ci prévoit quatre principes pour le règlement de ces conflits : « 1- Inviolabilité des frontières ; 2- garantie de la sécurité pour tous les peuples des zones en question, notamment grâce à des forces internationales de maintien de la paix ; 3- statut de large autonomie pour l'Abkhazie et le Haut-Karabakh à négocier entre toutes les parties concernées ; 4- droit de retour des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées et leur réintégration dans le respect des droits de l'homme. » On notera l'absence éloquente du mot autodétermination.

Dès lors le plan de paix proposé en juin aux trois parties (Arménie, Azerbaïdjan, Haut-Karabakh) par la triple co-présidence française, américaine et russe du Groupe de

Minsk de l'OSCE ne pouvait être que l'illustration de cette nouvelle règle du jeu établissant la prééminence du droit des Etats sur tout autre droit. Règle d'ailleurs fort ancienne, puisqu'elle rejoint la loi du plus fort. Comme à Lisbonne, l'OSCE, par ce plan, demande la reconnaissance par l'Arménie de l'intégrité territoriale de l'Azerbaïdjan, en échange d'un statut de grande autonomie pour le Haut-Karabakh.

Les détails du plan, dévoilés par la partie azerbaïdjanaise, précisent que le Haut-Karabakh aura droit à sa propre constitution, son emblème, son hymne et son drapeau, qu'il pourra conserver une garde nationale et une police militaire, réduites au strict nécessaire. Le Karabakh sera aussi déclaré zone économique franche, et Etat multi-ethnique, avec un budget fondé sur les seules ressources du territoire. En contrepartie les forces armées du Karabakh devront se retirer des territoires occupés, y compris Latchine et Chouchi, et permettre le retour des réfugiés azéris dans leurs foyers. A noter une clause révélatrice des contradictions de ce plan : l'armée du Karabakh sera comptabilisée avec les forces armées de l'Arménie dans le cadre du traité sur les forces conventionnelles (CFE) ; ainsi le Karabakh se trouverait sous la souveraineté de Bakou, mais son armée se trouverait, elle, rattachée à celle de l'Arménie. En poussant plus loin le raisonnement dans l'absurde, on arriverait à la conclusion que la population arménienne du territoire est étrangère sur son propre sol.

L'OSCE, par l'intermédiaire de forces multinationales, sera chargée de créer une zone de sécurité autour des frontières du Karabakh et contrôlera, sous le mandat de l'Azerbaïdjan, le corridor de Latchine, afin de veiller au fonctionnement normal des voies de communication entre l'Arménie et le Karabakh. A Denver, le 20 juin, les présidents Eltsine, Clinton et Chirac ont affirmé que ce plan constituait « une base appropriée pour aboutir à un accord » et ont appelé l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan à « adopter une attitude positive ». « Nous pensons qu'il ne devrait y avoir aucun délai dans l'établissement d'une paix stable et

durable dans la région », ont-ils souligné.

L'urgence de la paix pour les trois puissances médiatrices du conflit du Karabakh, c'est sans doute d'abord l'urgence économique de la production du pétrole azéri en mer Caspienne, dont le commencement est prévu pour août prochain. Présentée comme une source de prospérité pour la région, celle-ci se révèle surtout un obstacle à la paix, car l'Azerbaïdjan profite de ses richesses pétrolières pour ne plus chercher un compromis négocié. Avec l'appui des compagnies pétrolières occidentales, surtout anglo-américaines, et des gouvernements respectifs, Bakou se pose en vainqueur, alors qu'il a été battu sur le terrain, et maintient la revendication, inadmissible pour les Arméniens du Haut-Karabakh, d'un retour au statut d'autonomie d'avant 1988. Le blocage actuel des négociations provient ainsi en grande partie des appétits économiques des puissances occidentales, qui sous prétexte de résoudre le conflit, l'ont davantage prolongé par leur soutien à l'Azerbaïdjan.

La réflexion de Raffi Hovannisian (*Politique Internationale*, hiver 1997), ancien ministre des affaires étrangères de la république d'Arménie, va dans le même sens : la « *priorité absolue* » donnée au principe de l'intégrité territoriale, selon lui, « *n'a fait que prolonger le conflit tout en portant atteinte à la cause de la paix et de la sécurité internationale* ». Celle-ci autorise en effet l'Azerbaïdjan à se donner le droit de régler par la force des armes la question du Karabakh. Le président azéri Gueïdar Aliev a d'ailleurs menacé à plusieurs reprises, et tout dernièrement début mai à Izmir, de recourir à la force pour récupérer les territoires occupés. L'armée azerbaïdjanaise, en cours de réorganisation, grâce aux revenus du pétrole, dépasse largement les plafonds autorisés par le traité CFE, pour les chars, véhicules blindés et pièces d'artillerie (*U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency report*, 1996).

Le peuple du Haut-Karabakh, auquel l'OSCE refuse le droit de s'autodéterminer pour l'indépendance, se verrait reconnaître les garanties du droit des minorités, selon le Traité de Paris. Il reste que ces normes, valables dans des

Etats démocratiques, risquent fort d'être bafoués par l'Azerbaïdjan. La situation des droits de l'homme et des libertés de ce pays le place hors des normes démocratiques. S'exprimant au Sommet de Lisbonne, le président Ter Pétrossian avait souligné que l'expérience passée (pogroms de Soumgaït, de Kirovabad, Bakou, et déportation de villages arméniens du Haut-Karabagh, de 1988 à 1991) avait démontré que « *malgré toutes les assurances, l'Azerbaïdjan est incapable de garantir la sécurité de la population du Haut-Karabakh* ». La seule investiture des Etats-Unis, de la France et de la Russie, avec l'onction du pétrole, va-t-elle consacrer l'Azerbaïdjan pays démocratique ?

04/29/1997 - Is Russia's peacekeeping force in Abkhazia a new casus belli ? - RFE/RL:

By Liz Fuller

Politicians and political commentators in both Russia and Georgia predict that fighting between Georgia's central government and its breakaway Black Sea region of Abkhazia may soon break out again. The catalyst for rising tensions is the peacekeeping force deployed by Russia in June 1994 along Georgia's internal border with Abkhazia. The main task of the force -which is overwhelmingly Russian but operates under the aegis of the CIS- is to expedite the return to their homes of up to 200,000 ethnic Georgians who fled from the region during hostilities the previous year.

But the planned repatriation has been obstructed by the Abkhaz authorities, which tried to limit the number of returning Georgians to 200 a month. The peacekeepers have been unable to prevent violent reprisals by Abkhaz militants against some Georgian families who succeeded in returning to their homes. Moreover, the peacekeepers themselves have sustained considerable losses. Some 40 military and medical personnel have died in terrorist incidents, which the Abkhaz claim were perpetrated by Georgian agents provocateurs with links to that country's Ministry of National Security.

The modalities for the repatriation of Abkhazia's Georgian population are laid down in an April 1994

agreement between Georgian, Abkhaz, Russian, and UN representatives. But the Abkhaz authorities have sought to delay its implementation by insisting, for example, that all applications to return to Abkhazia be screened to preclude the repatriation of Georgians involved in the 1992-1993 fighting. Many displaced Georgian families chose to circumvent the official procedures and returned illegally to their homes, primarily in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion, whose pre-war population was 90% Georgian. Thousands of displaced Georgians are still quartered in hotels in Tbilisi and are increasingly exerting pressure on the Georgian leadership to expedite their return--if necessary by a military reconquest of Abkhazia.

Three years of talks on a political settlement defining future relations between the Georgian and Abkhaz authorities have yielded minimal results. Tbilisi has offered Sukhumi what it terms "maximum autonomy" within a federation, but the Abkhaz have insisted they will accept nothing less than equal status within a confederation. In the hope of securing Russian help in restoring its hegemony over Abkhazia, the Georgian leadership insisted that ratification of a 1995 treaty granting Russia the right to maintain military bases in Georgia be made contingent on Russian assistance in increasing the combat capability of the shambolic Georgian armed forces and in restoring Georgia's territorial integrity.

Beginning in January 1996, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze has repeatedly tried to persuade fellow CIS heads of state that the peacekeepers' mandate should be expanded to enable them to protect repatriated families more effectively, but he has had no success. At last month's CIS summit in Moscow, participants agreed that the area over which the peacekeepers are deployed should be extended northward to include the whole of Gali Raion and part of the neighboring Ochamchire Raion. It was also agreed that a plan to implement that decision should be drawn up by late April.

The Abkhaz leadership protested that the decision violated the formal May 1994 cease-fire agreement, whereby any change in the mandate of the peacekeeping force requires

the consent of both the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides. Abkhaz Minister of Defense Vladimir Mikanba recently explained that the advance of peacekeepers into Ochamchire would necessitate moving Abkhaz military detachments currently deployed there and would thus put the local Abkhaz population in danger. He said Abkhazia would insist that the peacekeepers be withdrawn altogether rather than be allowed to redeploy. He also warned that such a development would result in new fighting between Georgian and Abkhaz troops.

If hostilities were to resume, it is by no means certain that the Georgians could achieve their presumed objective of a swift and decisive military victory. Mikanba claims that Abkhazia would be able to mobilize 30,000 reservists to support its regular 5,000 troops. Georgian Defense Minister Vardiko Nadibaidze claimed last year that the Georgian armed forces number 49,000, but independent observers consider that figure inflated. Georgia is said to enjoy a numerical advantage in terms of armored vehicles, aircraft, and artillery, while Abkhazia reportedly has more naval landing craft. Those vessels could prove advantageous if the Abkhaz chose to launch an attack behind Georgian lines or to engage in judicious sabotage. The port of Poti, from where Georgia plans to export a shipment of Azerbaijan's Caspian oil to Ukraine next month, is only some 25 km down the coast from the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia.

05/28/1997 - Le marchandage sur les armes conventionnelles - Le Monde:

Par Marie Jégo

L'accord de la Russie à l'élargissement de l'Alliance atlantique à l'est a été obtenu au prix d'importantes concessions à Moscou, dans le cadre des négociations sur la modernisation du traité sur les forces conventionnelles en Europe (CFE) qui se poursuivent à Vienne. De fait, c'est bien lors des négociations sur l'élargissement qu'ont été dressées les grandes lignes de la mise à jour du traité CFE. Le 15 mai, au lendemain de l'annonce de la conclusion du « *pacte historique* » Russie-OTAN, un nouvel accord sur

la zone dite « *des flancs* », partie du CFE, était ratifié par l'Ukraine et la Géorgie, puis par les Républiques ex-soviétiques les plus réticentes à sa nouvelle formulation : l'Azerbaïdjan et la Moldavie. Toutes avaient émis des réserves, estimant que le nouveau document ne faisait que légitimer la présence militaire russe sur leur sol ou à leurs frontières, et déplorant que leurs zones de conflits - la Transnistrie pour la Moldavie, l'Abkhazie pour la Géorgie, le Haut-Karabakh pour l'Azerbaïdjan - ne soient pas évoquées dans l'accord alors que des quantités importantes d'armements y sont concentrées et échappent à tout contrôle.

Négocié à l'époque de la guerre froide, le traité CFE a été signé en novembre 1990 entre les pays de l'OTAN et du pacte de Varsovie pour limiter certaines catégories d'armements conventionnels (tanks, véhicules blindés, hélicoptères, artillerie lourde). Des quantités maximales (« *sous-plafonds* ») pour ces catégories d'armements ont été notamment fixées pour une zone dite « *zone des flancs* » qui s'étend de la Norvège à la Turquie et englobe tout ou partie des six anciennes Républiques soviétiques (Ukraine, Moldavie, Azerbaïdjan, Géorgie, Arménie et Kazakhstan). Moscou, qui lors de son intervention en Tchétchénie a largement violé les sous-plafonds régionaux, réclamait ces dernières années une renégociation du traité, menaçant de le dénoncer.

« *Déploiements temporaires* »

Le 31 mai 1996, la diplomatie russe a obtenu enfin de ses partenaires une interprétation plus extensive du CFE, conforme à la nouvelle donne née de l'éclatement du pacte de Varsovie. Ainsi le principe d'une limitation des arsenaux par pays, et non plus par bloc, est accepté. Dans le cadre des négociations qui se poursuivent à Vienne, les Russes réclament une révision à la hausse de leurs quotas, avant tout dans le Caucase.

Dans sa nouvelle rédaction, le document sur la « *zone des flancs* » autorise la Russie à considérer comme des « *déploiements temporaires* » les forces qu'elle stationne dans les anciennes Républiques soviétiques. Si le texte stipule que ces « *déploiements temporaires sur les territoires d'autres Etats doivent être le fruit de*

négociations libres et respectueuses de la souveraineté des parties concernées », cette précision n'a pas suffi à apaiser les inquiétudes des Etats de Transcaucasie, Azerbaïdjan et Géorgie en tête.

L'Arménie, le partenaire le plus fiable de Moscou dans la région, a ratifié le document sans histoires. Cette ratification est intervenue après la révélation par plusieurs officiels russes de la livraison illégale d'armes russes à l'Arménie, en violation du CFE. Entre 1994 et l'automne 1996, soit après la signature d'un cessez-le-feu au Haut-Karabakh, l'ancien ministre russe de la défense, Pavel Gratchev - pressenti, dit-on parfois à Moscou, comme un des futurs représentants de la Russie au siège de l'OTAN - aurait ainsi fourni pour 47 millions de dollars de chars, véhicules de transport de troupes, missiles SCUD et autres à l'Arménie, sans qu'un kopek de cette juteuse transaction ne soit reversé au budget russe, quand les Arméniens payaient « *rubis sur l'ongle* », selon le rapport établi par le général Lev Rokhline.

L'Azerbaïdjan, seule République de Transcaucasie qui a catégoriquement refusé le déploiement de troupes et de garde-frontières russes sur son sol, a signé l'accord sur les flancs au dernier moment dans la nuit du jeudi 15 au vendredi 16 mai, après un entretien téléphonique entre le vice-président américain, Al Gore, et Gueïdar Aliev, le président azerbaïdjanais. « *L'accord sur les flancs légitime la présence russe à nos frontières et peut se révéler un formidable levier de pression sur nous, déplore un diplomate azerbaïdjanais, mais nous n'avons pas le choix. Ou nous acceptons et nous avons le soutien américain, ou nous refusons et alors il n'y avait plus aucun contrôle sur la région* », conclut-il.

REVUE DE PRESSE / DEVELOPPING EVENTS

ARMENIE / ARMENIA

Politique étrangère et commerce extérieur / Foreign policy and trade

04/01/1997 - Armenia, Russia to intensify cooperation - RFE/RL:

At a post-summit meeting in Moscow on 29 March, Yeltsin and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan reached agreement on signing a new treaty on Friendship and Strategic Partnership to supersede the December 1991 accord, presidential spokesman Levon Zurabian told journalists in Yerevan on 31 March. Zurabian denied, however, that Armenia is contemplating joining the Russian-Belarusian union. Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin, who met with Ter-Petrosyan in Moscow on 27 March, told journalists that the new bilateral treaty will have "a military component," Nezavisimaya gazeta reported on 28 March.

04/10/1997 - Greek foreign minister in Yerevan - RFE/RL:

Theodoros Pangalos has called for expanding Armenian-Greek economic relations and for closer cooperation between Greece, Armenia, Georgia, and Iran in unspecified "areas of mutual concern," Asbarez and Armenpress reported. Pangalos was in Yerevan yesterday to meet with his Armenian counterpart, Alexander Arzumanyan, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, and Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan. He told journalists later that Greece supports the right of nations to self-determination, "whether [in the form of] cultural autonomy or fully-fledged independence." He said he believes the Karabakh conflict should be resolved in accordance with this principle. Pangalos also said Turkey's position vis-a-vis Karabakh was destabilizing and that Ankara should realize that the Ottoman Empire is dead and cannot be revived.

04/10/1997 - No Duma decision yet on alleged arms sales to Armenia - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

The Russian State Duma has rejected a proposal on the adoption of a draft resolution over the cases of violations of Russia's legislation while supplying weapons and military equipment to foreign states. The resolution implied illegal arms supplies to Armenia. The draft resolution, which was tabled to the Russian Parliament's Lower House by the Defense Committee (Chairman Lev Rokhlin), the Committee for Security (Chairman

Viktor Ilyukhin), and the Committee for Veterans' Affairs (Chairman Viktor Varennikov), has received 206 of the Parliament vote, which is 20 votes less than needed. Following proposals by a few parliamentarians the initial wording "Arms Supplies to Armenia" in the draft resolution was changed to "Arms Supplies to the Transcaucasian States." According to reports, this amendment was introduced mainly with Nikolay Ryzhkov's efforts. Parliamentarians Vladimir Ryzhkov, Alexey Mitrofanov, Galina Starovoydova and some others did not approve of the resolution.

04/14/1997 - Yeltsin had not authorized arms sale, Kremlin says - Reuter (Asbarez-on-line):

The Kremlin said Monday neither President Boris Yeltsin nor his government had authorized Russian arms supplies to Armenia. Yeltsin's press office said an investigation by the presidential administration had shown the arms were supplied without the permission of the government or the president. "It was established that neither the head of state nor the Russian government issued any decisions allowing supplies of arms and military equipment to Armenia," the presidential press office said in a statement. "At the same time, analysis of documents obtained (during the investigation) showed that some of the equipment and weapons were shipped in violation of rules set by presidential decrees and orders."

04/15/1997 - Armenia rejects Azerbaijan's claim on Zod - RFE/RL:

An Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesman has rejected as "unfounded" an Azerbaijani claim that 70% of the Zod gold deposits, located close to Armenia's frontier with Azerbaijan, are on Azerbaijani territory and that Armenian exploitation of the deposits is therefore "illegal," Armenian agencies reported on 11 April. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Tofik Zulfugarov reportedly made the claim early last week, and an unidentified geologist quoted by Turan on 10 April backed his statement. The U.S.-Armenian joint venture Global Gold Armenia plans to double the annual output of the

Zod and Meghradzor mines to 18 metric tons by 2000, which would make Armenia the world's 13th largest gold producer.

04/15/1997 - Armenia, Azerbaijan to cooperate on air transit - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Two new international transit air routes, Gumri-Kars and Sevan-Koutaisi, will traverse Armenia's air space, Edward Pilossian, Chief of the Air Service Department of Armenia's Civil Aviation Headquarters reported. At a regional meeting of delegations of civil aviation agencies from the Transcaucasian states, Iran and Turkey, Azerbaijan's representative, who is a TACIS Program officer, handed over the message by the Azeri Civil Aviation Department, saying that Azerbaijan welcomed the introduction of new air routes. According to Pilossian, there are no contradictions between Armenia and Azerbaijan in that field. Pilossian said that three transit air lines mainly connecting CIS states with Asian and Middle East countries are currently traversing Armenia's air space. The date of the opening of the new air routes has already been agreed on with Turkey and Georgia.

04/17/1997 - More fallout from « Yerevangate » arms scandal - RFE/RL:

Zahid Garalov, head of an Azerbaijani parliamentary delegation in Tbilisi to discuss Russian arms shipments to Armenia via Georgian territory, told a press conference yesterday that the arms transfers were sanctioned by Georgian Defense Minister Vardiko Nadibaidze, a close associate of former Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. The Armenian news agency Turan quoted Garalov as saying the weaponry included "tactical missiles of the P-17 complex," which can carry chemical or nuclear warheads. Nadibaidze, for his part, told the Azerbaijani ambassador in Tbilisi that he shared Azerbaijan's concern, Nezavisimaya gazeta reports today. Meanwhile, the Russian State Duma has approved a resolution demanding more stringent state control over arms sales abroad, ITAR-TASS reported yesterday.

ARF leader in one week to be denied entry into Armenia. Former ARF Bureau member and manager of the Alik newspaper in Iran, Albert Ajemian was also denied an entry visa to Armenia. The Yerevan news agency asked Armenia's foreign ministry for an explanation. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Arsen Gasparyan did not comment on the matter.

**04/16/1997 - Tomsen says
Armenian election laws should
be changed - Noyan Tapan
(Asbarez-on-line):**

"I wish that the second International Fund for Election Systems devoted to election laws, will contribute to the improvement of Armenia's election law," United States Ambassador to Armenia Peter Tomsen said at the opening of the Forum. German Ambassador to Armenia Carola Muller-Holtkemper stressed the importance of this arrangement in the establishment of democracy and said that a chance for the public discussion of crucial problems is among the most significant elements of democracy. During the discussion on election law changes, experts of the Council of Europe and IFES, Bernard Owen and Jessy Pilgrim responded negatively towards the idea of separating the electoral and counting commissions during elections.

**04/18/1997 - Manifestation de 15
000 opposants à Erevan - AFP:**

Près de 15 000 opposants au président arménien Levon Ter Petrossian ont manifesté vendredi dans la capitale Erevan à l'appel d'une coalition des principaux partis d'opposition, a constaté l'AFP. Vazguen Manoukian, candidat malheureux à l'élection présidentielle du 22 septembre dernier et l'un des leaders de la nouvelle coalition, a appelé lors de la manifestation à des élections présidentielles et législatives anticipées et à l'adoption d'une nouvelle constitution. L'opposition affirme que les résultats du scrutin présidentiel de septembre ont été falsifiés pour permettre à M. Ter Petrossian de rester au pouvoir. « Il faut nous organiser partout. Si le peuple est certain que ce pouvoir doit, il doit s'organiser lui-même, faire preuve de raison et ne pas permettre les provocations du

pouvoir, » a lancé M. Manoukian. « Nous ne devons pas permettre à quelques uns de conduire l'Etat vers le gouffre », a-t-il poursuivi. La coalition a appelé ses partisans à manifester de nouveau le 24 avril. Des rassemblements doivent avoir lieu toutes les semaines. La nouvelle coalition, qui rassemble sept partis d'opposition, dont le Dachnaksoutioun, interdit par M. Ter Petrossian, a été fondée fin mars.

**04/21/1997 - Armenian opposition
demonstration in Yerevan -
RFE/RL:**

Between 10,000 and 20,000 people took part in a rally organised by the Union for National Accord in Yerevan on 18 April, Western agencies reported. This was the second in a planned series of fortnightly demonstrations organised by the recently formed opposition party. Addressing the rally, defeated former presidential candidate Vazgen Manukyan again called for pre-term parliamentary elections. Also on 18 April, the Armenian Central Electoral Commission rejected imprisoned Dashnak leader Vahan Oganessian's application to contest an upcoming parliamentary by-election, according to AP.

**04/23/1997 - Armenian National
Assembly to regulate
amendments - Noyan Tapan
(Asbarez-on-line):**

The National Assembly Wednesday discussed a bill "on amending parliament regulations." The amendment was approved by 81 affirmative votes, with 32 opponents and 26 abstentions. The authors of the bill are deputies David Shahnazarian, Aramazd Zakarian and members of the Republic faction Petros Makeyan and Hovhannes Tokmajian. According to David Shahnazarian, the experience of the past two years has shown that the Parliament's regulations are not perfect. The proposed changes are far from being final as well. The amendments and additions give deputies a chance to make 3-minute statements at sessions, bans voting on bills at closed sessions and prohibits to arrest or search deputies unless these actions are coordinated with Parliament leadership. The bill particularly enables deputies to change factions

and also concerns the terms of establishment of deputy groups.

**04/28/1997 - Leftist Alliance
begins activities in Armenia -
Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):**

"Only by joining the new Union of Russia and Belarus, Armenia is able to ensure its real independence and overcome the social and economic crisis. Only with the new Union will Armenia be able to find a real solution to the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh," declared Armenian Communist leader Sergey Badalian at a constituent conference of the national-patriotic forces of Armenia. The primary goal of this constituent conference of the Alliance of National-Patriotic Forces of Armenia, which is comprised of the Communist and Social-Democratic Parties, "Haykandoukht", "Azgain Veradznund" and "Hai Thad" public political organizations is to endorse the constitution, which was drawn up in shape of a contract between these organizations, election of a coordinating council and an executive of the council.

**04/30/1997 - Armenian National
Assembly adopts general pardon
law - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-
line):**

Armenia's National Assembly, during an executive session Wednesday, passed a law on general pardon of prisoners, by which more than 4,500 prisoners would be eligible for release or a lesser sentence. Armenia's Justice Minister Marat Aleksanian, representing Levon Ter-Petrosyan at the parliamentary session, announced during a news briefing that the bill passed by a vote of 170 in favor, two opposed and two abstentions. He outlined that the law would immediately effect 850 prisoners, while the remaining prisoner cases would be re-investigated and either a release or a lower sentence would be given to those individuals. Aleksanian further explained that the law would not apply to individuals currently imprisoned for the so-called "Dro" or "Trial of 31" since mass disorder has traditionally been deemed a more severe crime.

04/30/1997 - Bagratian establishes own party - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Bagratian, announced his intention for establishing his own political party which will be called the "Liberty" Party. The Party's main objective would be to protect business-owners' rights. Bagratian was deputy prime minister and economy minister until 1990, and from Feb. 1993 to Nov. 1996, served as Armenia's Prime Minister. Bagratian is viewed as the principal ideologist of fundamental economic reforms in Armenia. After stepping down from his position as prime minister last November, Bagratian said he would not run for any other political office. Currently, he is an expert on Russia for the International Monetary Fund. The platform of the Party was scheduled to be published in a new newspaper titled "Menk Plus" (We Plus).

05/12/1997 - Human rights group says Hovanessian verdict flawed - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Experts from Avangard-Center for Humanitarian Studies have made public serious violations of the law in the court decision rejecting Vahan Hovanessian's appeal to the Supreme Court after being barred by the Central Electoral Commission to run for a vacant National Assembly seat. Hovanessian, a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Executive Council of Armenia and a defendant in the "Trial of 31," was denied candidacy by the CEC, before formally appealing to the Supreme Court. The analysis of the violations have been outlined in a memorandum. Avangard President Edward Mamikonian and Vice-President Ohanes Asrian, who is also the co-chairman of the Council for the Protection of Political Prisoners of Armenia, are going to send the memorandum to all embassies in Armenia and international human rights organizations. The goal of the memorandum, as the document's authors state, is to draw the attention of various individuals and organizations to the unlawfulness of the CEC decision refusing to register Hovanessian as a candidate for the National Assembly of Armenia. Referring to Armenia's Election Code, the Court recognized the Central Electoral Commission to be entitled to deny registration to a

deputy candidate. However, the experts say, under all judicial norms in a law-governed state, the Constitution should be unconditionally superior to any legal or sub-legislative acts, including the Election Code (Articles 6 and 116). Under Article 27 of the Constitution, which says that only an incapable or convicted person can be denied registration. Since the Court has not handed down a verdict in the "Trial of 31" case, Hovanessian, therefore, is eligible under the Constitution, regardless of any subjective reading of the Election Code, to be granted candidacy for the National Assembly.

05/13/1997 - "Dro" defendant Gegham Manoukian released on amnesty - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

So-called "Dro" case defendant Gegham Manoukian was released Tuesday becoming the first prisoner to be released under the new amnesty law recently passed in Armenia's National Assembly. Manoukian was arrested following the ill-fated Dec. 28, 1994 decree by Levon Ter-Petrosyan banning the activities of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Armenia. Manoukian was subsequently charged under article 72 of Armenia's Criminal Code which stipulates that individuals who take part in "banditism" against the state shall be imprisoned anywhere from five to 15 years. Following the lengthy trial, which took almost two years, Manoukian was sentenced to three years imprisonment under Article 84 of the criminal code, which calls for a two to five-year jail term for the offense of not disclosing information regarding acts against the state. Manoukian and all other "Dro" defendants appealed the verdicts reached last December, however, the appeals have not yet been heard in Armenia's courts. When reached by telephone from Asbarez, Manoukian stated that the outcome of the entire trial failed to implicate the ARF in any wrongdoing, adding that the authorities were unable to reach their intended goal of discrediting the ARF. He added that his release fell under the general provisions of the amnesty law and was not an appeasement toward his person.

05/16/1997 - Two "Trial of 31" defendants released - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

"Trial of 31" defendants Vagif Avetissian and Andranik Hambartsoumian were released from custody Friday due to severe illness and the condition of their respective families. Following arguments by chief prosecutor Lulibert Charkhifalakian and defense attorney Souren Tcherkezian the court ruled in favor of the defendants' release. The two defendants were charged with plotting the forceful overthrow of the government and treason, while Hambartsoumian was also charged with possession of illegal weapons. For the first time, the court session of the "Trial of 31" was being videotaped by the state-run television station.

05/16/1997 - Kocharian meets with prisoners' defense council - Fact (Asbarez-on-line):

Armenia's Prime Minister Robert Kocharian met Friday with leaders of the Armenian political prisoners' defense council Raphael Ghazarian, Vladimir Khodjabegian, Tsitsilia Broudian, Razmig Davoyan, Sarkis Mouradian, Henrik Hovanessian, Rouben Torosyan and Ludwig Khatchatrian. The prime minister's information service reported that the meeting centered around Armenia's domestic political crisis emanating from last September's presidential elections. Members of the prisoners' defense council expressed their concerns regarding the cases against individuals arrested following the Sept. 25 events. Kocharian emphasized the importance of establishing corresponding legal structures in the fight against social injustice, illegalities and bribery within the republic.

05/27/1997 - Prosecutor general withdraws protest for Markarian verdict - Golos Armenii (Asbarez-on-line):

Armenia's prosecutor general Henrik Khatchatrian Tuesday withdrew a appeal filed by his predecessor Ardavazt Gevorkian protesting the shortness of the sentence given to so-called "Dro" defendant Hrant Markarian. The famed "Dro" trial, which began in August 1995 and lasted until December 1996, was unable to

prove charges of terrorism, drug trafficking against Markarian, and in the end, sentenced Markarian to a five-year prison term for possession of illegal weapons and fake travelling documents.. Former prosecutor general Gevorgian, ignoring the court's final decision, petitioned the court to review its verdict and grant Markarian a stiffer sentence, only to validate the trumped up charges filed by his ministry following a highly controversial preliminary investigation. Numerous observers, including international organizations and government representatives, have noted that defendants charged in the so-called "Dro" case were unduly harassed during the preliminary investigation, and often brutally beaten during interrogation. An appeals court is scheduled to review all "Dro" trial-related appeals, and Khatchatrian's withdrawal is also scheduled to be reviewed at that time. "The so-called 'Dro,' '31' and 'Sept. 25' are unnecessarily delayed, and often some of the charges seem to be fabricated," stated Khatchatrian during a meeting Thursday with defense attorneys of these cases. Khatchatrian promised to review the cases and correct any illegalities which have occurred.

05/27/1997 - ARF's seized property being returned - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

The process of returning the seized property of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation began last week, said a spokesperson of the ARF Executive Council of Armenia. The property was seized following the now infamous presidential decree on Dec. 28, 1994 banning the activities of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Armenia. The ARF is welcoming the return of its property, however the process is not directly linked to the reopening of the party in Armenia.

06/02/1997 - Armenian leadership criticized from all sides - RFE/RL:

On 29 May, some 250 delegates attended the inaugural congress in Yerevan of former Armenian prime minister Hrant Bagratyan's new right-wing liberal political party, Azatutyun [Liberty], Armenian agencies reported. Addressing the congress, Bagratyan harshly criticized the policies of the present

leadership. He argued that domestic politics could not be artificially separated from socio-economic conditions. He added that the power of the state must be circumscribed and elections laws revised in the wake of last year's disputed presidential elections. At a public rally on 29 May attended by some 3,000 people, representatives of opposition parties aligned in the National Alliance called for pre-term parliamentary elections. Also on 29 May, representatives of four groups, including the Union of Industrialists and Businessmen, issued a statement criticizing the leadership's economic policies and stating their intention to draft an alternative economic development program.

06/10/1997 - Armenian Supreme Court hands down suspended sentence in "25 September" trial - RFE/RL:

Dashnak party member Kim Balayan has received a two-year suspended sentence on charges of inciting mass disturbances, Noyan Tapan reported on 9 June. The charges refer to Balayan's alleged role in the 25 September attack on the Armenian parliament building, which occurred shortly after last year's disputed presidential election. Five other defendants were amnestied on 5 June after receiving sentences of between 18 and 30 months.

06/11/1997 - Armenian National Assembly debates draft laws on military service - RFE/RL:

The Armenian parliament on 10 June began debating two alternative draft laws on military service, according to Interfax and Noyan Tapan. The first bill makes military service mandatory for all men aged 18-27 and abolishes deferment for students, while the second preserves the provision for student deferment. Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsian argued in favor of the first bill, saying that the army "needs intellect" and is suffering a manpower shortage because between 3,000 - 4,000 draft-age men are studying. He warned that Armenia is involved in a "permanently slumbering war" and that hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh will resume as soon as Azerbaijan "becomes equal [to] or stronger" than Armenia. Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliiev recently

called for the abolition of concessions enabling students to avoid military service.

06/11/1997 - Armenian President meets with Hairikyan - RFE/RL:

Levon Ter-Petrosyan on 10 June met with Union for Self-Determination chairman Paruir Hairikyan, whom he has termed his "ideal" of a political leader, Armenian agencies reported. The talks focused on Hairikyan's recent statement calling for pre-term elections and for an international diplomatic campaign "to achieve international condemnation of the 1915 genocide." Hairikyan quoted the president as saying that preparations for new elections will take time but that a new electoral law has already been drafted. Haik Babukhanyan--the deputy chairman of the Union of Constitutional Right, which is aligned with the Union for Self-Determination in the seven-party opposition National Alliance--said Hairikyan's meeting with the president was "counterproductive." The National Alliance launched a one-week protest on 6 June to demand new elections at all levels and a new constitution.

06/12/1997 - Armenian Parliamentary speaker tenders resignation - RFE/RL:

Babken Ararktsyan offered his resignation on 11 June after his proposed draft law on military conscription received only 55 votes, Reuters and Armenian agencies reported. Ararktsyan's law retained deferment for students. Deputies voted instead to consider an alternative draft law drawn up by Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsian after President Levon Ter-Petrosyan proposed that its provision on abolishing deferment for students go into effect only next year. Ararktsyan said he was resigning because the Defense Ministry had exerted "brutal" pressure on deputies to vote for Sargsian's draft, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. The parliament voted by 131 votes to 11 not to accept Ararktsyan's resignation. Also on 11 June, Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan dismissed rumors that Ter-Petrosyan is to receive medical treatment abroad, saying "as far as I know, the president is in good health," Noyan Tapan reported.

06/16/1997 - Demonstrations in Yerevan - RFE/RL:

Some 15,000 people took part in a demonstration on 13 June in Yerevan to demand new presidential, parliamentary, and local elections and the adoption of a new constitution, Western agencies reported. Thousands more demonstrators attended similar protests in 16 other towns. Meanwhile, Babken Ararktsyan has canceled all official meetings following his resignation as parliamentary speaker on 11 June, according to Interfax.

06/17/1997 - First issue of "Hayots Ashkhar" published - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

The first issue of "Hayots Ashkhar" newspaper was published Tuesday. "The newspaper is the organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, in essence, but not officially," said Gagik Mkrtchian, member of the ARF Executive Council of Armenia and Editor-in-Chief of the paper. "Our aim is not to become an elite paper but a paper of the people," he noted. Mkrtchian further explained that the newspaper will mainly cover problems pertaining to human rights, democracy, the Armenian Cause, the Karabakh issue, the military, and the Diaspora. The primary objective is to address national goals and ideals. According to Gagik Mkrtchian, there have not been any obstacles in the registration and publication of the paper. "The fact that confiscated property has been returned and the lack of obstacles in the registration of this newspaper gives us hope that ARF related issues will be solved. But it is just a hope," he said. "Hayots Ashkhar" has 30 staff members, 90 percent of whom formerly worked in the "Yerkir" daily. The paper, which has no financial problems, was founded by the staff.

06/17/1997 - Armenian parliament crisis defused - RFE/RL:

Babken Ararktsyan resumed his duties as parliamentary speaker on 16 June after lengthy discussions with President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, and Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsian, Armenian agencies reported. On 11 June, Ararktsyan had offered his resignation to protest the rejection of a draft law he had proposed that

would allow students to continue to defer conscription (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 12 June 1997). The parliament, however, voted not to accept his resignation. Discussion of an alternative draft law, which abolishes the deferment provision, is to be postponed until the fall. If adopted, that bill will take effect only in 1998. Eduard Yegoryan, the chairman of the parliamentary Commission on State and Legal Affairs, condemned the mentality whereby the "first thought that comes to parents when a son is born is how to exempt him from military service," Noyan Tapan reported.

06/20/1997 - Journalists must be protected from pressure of government structures - Noyan Tapan:

"We demand that the President of Armenia who is a guarantor of constitutional rights of the citizenry, should protect from any pressure on journalists on the part of government structures and provide for the opportunity to freely fulfill professional duties", Noyan Tapan journalists said in their statement issued Friday at a news conference. On June 18 three employees of the news agency were invited to the Ministry of Interior and National Security where they were requested to disclose a source of information disseminated earlier by the agency. Immediately after arriving at the Ministry Director General of the news agency Tigran Haroutiunian, editor-in-chief Gayaneh Arakelian and a journalist Zhanna Krikorova were isolated from each other, while Haroutiunian was taken to a top-ranking official of the Ministry. Seven hours later Zhanna Krikorova returned to the agency in a state of the deepest stress. She suffered a heart attack. Noyan Tapan journalists noted that it was the third instance. Journalists with "Molorak" and "Haykakan Zhamanak" newspapers were also once invited to the aforementioned ministry and requested to name a source of information. "This fact should be viewed as a serious warning to all journalists since nobody is insured from similar pressure," Noyan Tapan journalists said, calling on their colleagues to unite and elaborate mechanisms of protection of journalists' rights. Sakharov's Human Rights Fund, Helsinki Committee of Armenia and the

Armenian Press Club voiced their support for Noyan Tapan journalists and announced that they would also come out with relevant statements.

06/25/1997 - Appellate court hears "Dro" grievances - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

"Despite assertions by governmental spokesperson Levon Zourabian and Prosecutor General Henrik Khachatryan that there are no political prisoners in Armenia, I still insist that Hrant Markarian is a political prisoner," attorney Rouben Sahakian said Tuesday at a Court of Appeals session of the Supreme Courts Presidium. The "Dro" appeals process began on June 19 as attorneys described in detail the verdict passed on Dec. 10 of last year. Defendants Arsen Artsruni, Armenak Mnjoyan and Armen Grigorian were sentenced to death for drug trafficking, the murder of Ashot Nersissian and his spouse Nuneh Maroukian and Gagik Sahakian. The other defendants, Armenak Zakarian, Hovhannes Mkrtchian, Ara Harmandayan, Edik Simonian, Gevorg Alaverdian and Tatul Gabrielian were sentenced to varying prison terms for participation in the "Dro" group. The charges of organizing a clandestine structure and complying to its activities brought against Hrant Markarian were later dropped. He was sentenced to five years in prison for possession and use of a counterfeit passport and illegal possession of arms. Markarians attorney Rouben Sahakian said that his client had been accused of wrong-doings which were directly connected with the defense of Nagorno-Karabakh. Markarian had a license allowing him to possess arms issued by the commander of the Karabakh army. However, the court paid no attention to that. Sahakian said that in most cases the court has sentenced a defendant charged on 232 counts of illegal possession of arms to less than one year imprisonment. "Then why in the case of Hrant Markarian did the court sentence him to the maximum term and ignored the mitigating circumstances. It suggests that somebody wanted to distance Markarian from defending Karabakh." Noting that Markarian has already served two and a half years in prison, Sahakian, on behalf of Markarians wife and children, appealed to the court to reduce the prison term from five to three years.

"Hrant Markarian must no longer be kept in custody," Sahakian said. The next session of the Court of Appeals is scheduled for Saturday.

GEORGIE / GEORGIA

Conflict abkhaz / Abkhaz conflict

04/01/1997 - Reaction to decision on Abkhaz peacekeepers - RFE/RL:

The Abkhaz leadership last week rejected the decision by the CIS heads of state to expand the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force in Abkhazia, Russian Public TV reported. Abkhaz parliamentary speaker Sokrat Djindjolia told Interfax on 31 March that if the CIS unilaterally amends the peacekeepers' mandate, Abkhazia will insist that they leave Abkhazia. The Abkhaz parliament has already voted to suspend further talks on future political relations between Abkhazia and the central Georgian government until Moscow lifts economic sanctions against Abkhazia. Meanwhile, Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili has said if there is no swift breakthrough in resolving the Abkhaz crisis, Georgia will invite the UN and the OSCE to take over the mediation process, Russian Independent Television reported.

04/16/1997 - Georgian-Abkhaz peace talks to resume ? - RFE/RL:

Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili says Tbilisi has accepted Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba's offer to resume quadrilateral peace talks in which the UN and Russia will also take part, ITAR-TASS reported yesterday. The Abkhaz parliament, however, opposes resuming negotiations until the Russian trade embargo against Abkhazia is lifted. It also rejects the decision of the March CIS summit to broaden the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia. Menagharishvili said implementation of that decision would be "an indicator of whether or not the CIS can perform its function." But he denied that Georgia will consider leaving the CIS if the decision is not implemented.

04/17/1997 - Abkhazia cuts power supplies to Georgia - RFE/RL:

Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba on 15 April ordered power supplies to Georgia to be cut off in retaliation for Tbilisi's decision the previous day to re-route all telephone communications from Abkhazia to Russia via Tbilisi, ITAR-TASS reported. Georgian Minister of Communications Pridon Indjia said his country's decision was in accordance with international agreements. An Abkhaz government statement denied this was the case, saying the move was a violation of human rights and could jeopardize further peace talks.

04/18/1997 - Abkhaz president rules out further talks with Georgia - RFE/RL:

Vladislav Ardzinba says the re-routing of all telephone communications from Russia to Abkhazia via Georgia was "a political act" that showed Russia is trying to force Abkhazia to agree to enter a federation with Georgia, AFP reported yesterday, quoting Interfax. Ardzinba ruled out further talks with Georgia on a political solution to the conflict, while Georgian presidential adviser Shalva Pichkhadze told Interfax that Georgia has exhausted almost "all areas of compromise" with Abkhazia. He hinted that Georgia could be forced to seek alternative mediators if the resolution adopted at the March CIS summit on broadening the mandate of the CIS peacekeepers in Abkhazia is not implemented.

04/23/1997 - North Caucasian presidents want greater role in mediating Abkhaz conflict - RFE/RL:

The presidents of Russia's North Caucasian republics believe that, given the opportunity, they could mediate a political settlement between the Georgian and Abkhaz leaderships, RFE/RL's Tbilisi bureau reported yesterday, citing BS-Press. Unnamed North Caucasian leaders are reportedly unhappy that the mediation process is monopolized by international organizations. They say they want to play a greater role in that process. Georgia enjoys harmonious relations with North Ossetia and is expanding ties with Chechnya. Georgian First Deputy Security Minister Avtandil Ioseliani

will travel to the North Caucasus next month.

04/30/1997 - New prime minister appointed in Abkhazia - RFE/RL:

Sergei Bagapsh, a former first secretary of the Abkhaz Komsomol and most recently a permanent representative of the Abkhaz leadership in Moscow, has been appointed Abkhaz prime minister, Interfax and BS-Press reported yesterday. Bagapsh replaces Gennadii Gulua, who resigned for health reasons on 24 April. Bagapsh is a native of Ochamchire Raion, where support for Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba is plummeting.

05/07/1997 - Russia to chair new round of talks on Abkhazia - RFE/RL:

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Valerii Nesterushkin told journalists yesterday that Russia will chair a new round of talks between Georgia and the leadership of the breakaway Black Sea region of Abkhazia on expanding the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force there, ITAR-TASS reported. The decision to broaden the peacekeepers' mandate was taken at the March CIS summit. Last week, a Russian Foreign Ministry delegation held talks with the Abkhaz leadership, which rejects the proposed deployment of peacekeepers in Ochamchira Raion and argues that no changes can be made in the force's mandate without Abkhazia's consent. Meanwhile, Leni Fischer, the president of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, said in Tbilisi yesterday that the Abkhaz dispute is not an obstacle to Georgia's aspirations for full council membership.

05/09/1997 - Abkhaz roundup - RFE/RL:

The UN Security Council has approved Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposal that, together with Russia, the UN should expand its role in mediating a political settlement to the Abkhaz conflict, ITAR-TASS and dpa reported yesterday. But Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba told Interfax on 7 May that further talks with the Georgian leadership are "impossible" at the present time. Speaking to journalists in Tbilisi the

same day, Georgian First Deputy Security Minister Avtandil Ioseliani denied reports that Ardzinba has visited Tbilisi to discuss dividing control of Abkhazia between the central government in Tbilisi and the separatist government in Sukhumi. Also on 7 May, the Georgian army held unannounced military exercises in Senaki Raion, which borders on Abkhazia.

05/23/1997 - Georgian President calls on UN to take more principled stand on Abkhazia - RFE/RL:

Meeting in Tbilisi on 21 May with UN Under Secretary-General Marrack Goulding, Eduard Shevardnadze said that although the UN has played an important role in creating the legal framework for a settlement of the Abkhaz conflict, it should take "a more principled position" in order to expedite the peace process. Nezavisimaya gazeta reported on 23 May. Shevardnadze argued that the presence of a CIS peacekeeping force along the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia is an obstacle to the negotiating process. He also said its withdrawal would not lead to a resumption of hostilities, Interfax reported on 22 May.

05/26/1997 - Une parade militaire à Tbilissi pour intimider les séparatistes - AFP:

La Géorgie a organisé lundi une parade militaire d'une envergure sans précédent, à l'occasion du jour de l'indépendance, pour faire comprendre aux séparatistes abkhazes et ossètes qu'elle était prête à « défendre son intégrité territoriale ». Trois mille militaires géorgiens - sur les 30 000 que revendique officiellement l'armée de cette ex-république soviétique - accompagnés d'une centaine de blindés ont défilé lundi au centre de Tbilissi lors d'une parade célébrant le 79ème anniversaire de la Géorgie indépendante. Sept avions d'assaut SU-25 et cinq hélicoptères militaires portant les couleurs nationales ont également sillonné le ciel de la capitale géorgienne. Il s'agit de la plus importante parade militaire en Géorgie depuis la proclamation de son indépendance fin 1991. « Aujourd'hui la Géorgie a une véritable armée capable s'il le faut de défendre l'intégrité territoriale de

l'Etat », a déclaré lundi le ministre de la Défense Vardiko Nadibaïdze, dans un discours prononcé lors de la parade. La Géorgie est arrivée cette année à un accord avec la Russie sur le partage définitif des équipements militaires restés sur son territoire après l'effondrement de l'URSS. La parade s'est déroulée sur fond d'instauration d'un couvre-feu samedi dernier en Abkhazie. Lundi dernier, le président géorgien Edouard Chevardnadze a répété que la Géorgie était prête à « défendre par la force son intégrité territoriale ». Il avait sévèrement critiqué les forces russes d'interposition déployées à la « frontière » entre la Géorgie et l'Abkhazie, fustigeant « leur incapacité à régler les conflits régionaux ». Quelque 1 500 partisans du leader nationaliste décédé Zviad Gamsakhourdia se sont rassemblés également près de la place centrale de Tbilissi. Lorsqu'ils ont commencé à progresser vers le centre, la police a dispersé la foule de ces « zviadistes », en utilisant des matraques et elle a arrêté 18 personnes.

05/28/1997 - Georgian President rejects Abkhaz peace proposal - RFE/RL:

Addressing the Georgian parliament on 27 May, Eduard Shevardnadze rejected the recent proposal by Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba that Georgia should conclude a peace agreement with his breakaway region modeled on the Russian-Chechen treaty signed on 12 May, ITAR-TASS and BS-Press reported. Shevardnadze argued that Chechnya wanted to break away from Russia whereas Abkhazia wants to join the Russian Federation. This, however, is incorrect: Ardzinba wants either international recognition for Abkhazia as an independent state or equal status with Georgia within a confederation. Shevardnadze called for an international conference on resolving the conflict under UN auspices with the participation of the OSCE, the U.S., France, Germany, the U.K., and North Caucasus leaders.

06/02/1997 - Georgian Parliament issues ultimatum over peacekeepers - RFE/RL:

The parliament on 30 May passed a resolution calling for the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force deployed along the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia if the decision to broaden its mandate is not implemented by 31 July, Russian agencies reported. The Abkhaz leadership has rejected the decision taken at the CIS heads of state summit in March to redeploy the force throughout Abkhazia's Gali Raion, arguing that the force's original mandate can be amended only with the consent of the Abkhaz side. The Georgian parliamentary resolution said that Georgia may reconsider its CIS membership if that body proves incapable of implementing its own decisions. The parliament also adopted an appeal to the Abkhaz population stating that the Georgian leadership will do its best to prevent a resumption of hostilities if the peacekeeping force is withdrawn, according to Interfax.

06/03/1997 - Russian President accuses Georgia of political blackmail - RFE/RL:

Russian presidential press spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembskii on 2 June condemned as "political blackmail" the resolution adopted by the Georgian parliament on 30 May laying down conditions for the continued deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force in Abkhazia, Interfax reported. The resolution calls for the peacekeepers' withdrawal unless they are redeployed throughout Abkhazia's Gali Raion by 31 July. The decision on their redeployment was taken at the March summit of the CIS heads of state. Yastrzhembskii hinted that Russia might withdraw the force, which is composed exclusively of Russian troops. Also on 2 June, in his regular Monday radio broadcast, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze proposed immediate talks with the Abkhaz leadership on guaranteeing continued compliance with the existing cease-fire, BS-Press reported. Shevardnadze said the withdrawal of the peacekeeping force would not preclude Russia's continued role in mediating a settlement of the conflict.

06/05/1997 - Abkhaz Foreign Minister in Moscow - RFE/RL:

After meeting in Moscow on 4 June with Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov, Sergei

Shamba said Abkhazia wants an extension of the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force currently deployed along the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, Russian agencies reported. Shamba said their withdrawal would hinder a political solution to the conflict and that Abkhaz troops would immediately take their place, possibly supported by units from the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. In Tbilisi, parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania rejected Russian presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembskii's charge that the 30 May Georgian parliament resolution setting conditions for the peacekeepers' continued presence constituted "blackmail." Georgian presidential press spokesman Vakhtang Abashidze said that Eduard Shevardnadze has again appealed to the Russian leadership to implement the decision taken at the March summit of the CIS heads of state to broaden the peacekeepers' mandate.

06/06/1997 - Georgian Defense Ministry denies plans to invade Abkhazia - RFE/RL:

The Defense Ministry has issued a statement denying press reports that Georgian forces are preparing for a military attack on Abkhazia, ITAR-TASS reported on 6 June. The press reports claimed that the reason for First Deputy Defense Minister Dzhoni Pirtskhalaishvili's resignation was not personal friction between himself and Defense Minister Vardiko Nadibaidze but Pirtskhalaishvili's opposition to the planned offensive. Addressing troops on 26 May, the anniversary of the 1918 proclamation of Georgia's independence, Nadibaidze had said that their primary obligation was to restore Georgia's territorial integrity, if necessary by force.

06/09/1997 - Georgia, Abkhazia "on brink of war" - RFE/RL:

Participants at a conference in Tbilisi on 6 June expressed concern that failure to extend the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force currently deployed along the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia will result in the renewal of hostilities, a spokesman for Britain's NGO Vertic, which organized the conference, told RFE/RL Newsline on 8 June. "We are balancing on

the brink of war," according to Zurab Erkvania, chairman of the Abkhaz government in exile. Georgian Deputy Parliamentary Chairman Vakhtang Kolbaia said Tbilisi is ready to start negotiations with Sukhumi at all levels and in any form. Kolbaia reiterated Georgia's offer to give Abkhazia the broadest possible autonomy within a unified Georgian state. Meanwhile, Tamaz Nadareishvili, the chairman of the Abkhaz parliament in exile, accused Russia of making its assistance in resolving the conflict contingent on Georgian help "to rebuild the Soviet Union."

06/09/1997 - Le leader abkhaze reçu à Moscou - AFP:

Le leader de la République séparatiste géorgienne d'Abkhazie, Valdislav Ardzinba, a rencontré lundi à Moscou plusieurs hauts responsables russes, sur fond de tension grandissante à la frontière géorgo-abkhaze patrouillée par une force russe de maintien de la paix. M. Ardzinba a été reçu notamment par les ministres de la Défense et des Affaires étrangères, Igor Sergueev et Evgueni Primakov, le chef de l'administration présidentielle Valentin Ioumachev et le secrétaire du conseil de sécurité Ivan Rybkine, selon un communiqué de la présidence russe. Les responsables russes ont réitéré à cette occasion leur position en faveur d'un « document » abkhazo-géorgien qui permette de désamorcer la tension actuelle et de fixer les bases de futures négociations entre Tbilissi et sa province rebelle, sous l'égide de l'ONU et de la Russie, selon la présidence. De son côté, M. Ardzinba a plaidé pour le maintien de la force de maintien de la paix russe, forte de 3 000 hommes, à la frontière abkhazo-géorgienne pour éviter une reprise du conflit. La Géorgie a vivement critiqué la force de maintien de la paix ces dernières semaines, affirmant qu'elle ne remplissait pas la mission qui lui avait été fixée de faciliter le retour des 200 000 Géorgiens chassés d'Abkhazie. La Russie a réagi en menaçant de retirer cette force, dont le mandat expire fin juillet.

06/09/1997 - Russian-Abkhaz high-level talks in Moscow - RFE/RL:

On 5-6 June, separate talks took place in Moscow between Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba and Russian Foreign Ministry officials and between Georgian ambassador Vazha Lortkipanidze and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Valerii Serov. Following his arrival in the Russian capital on 8 June, Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba said again that he is prepared to sign a peace treaty with Georgia, similar to that concluded between Russia and Chechnya on 12 May, "if the Georgian side has goodwill," Interfax reported. He warned that the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force could lead to a resumption of hostilities. Addressing the Abkhaz parliament the previous day, Ardzinba had ruled out talks with Georgia on Abkhaz autonomy and reiterated his demand that Abkhazia and Georgia have equal status.

06/10/1997 - Preparations for international conference on Abkhazia already under way ? - RFE/RL:

In his weekly radio address, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze said on 9 June that "hard work is under way" to convene an international conference on resolving the Abkhaz conflict, according to Interfax. Shevardnadze said Russia could organize such a meeting in the Black Sea resort of Sochi. He also reiterated that "Georgia's president and authorities have done everything to ensure the peaceful resolution of the conflict taking Russia's interests into account" but without success, Nezavisimaya gazeta reported on 10 June. Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba was scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov on 9 June, according to NTV. However, there have been no reports on whether the meeting took place.

06/11/1997 - Russian leaders pressure Ardzinba - RFE/RL:

Foreign Minister Yevgenii Primakov, Defense Minister Igor Sergueev, Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin, and Presidential Chief of Staff Valentin Yumashev met with Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba in Moscow on 9 June, Interfax reported. The Russian leaders made it clear they want Georgia and Abkhazia to sign an

agreement ending hostilities and "defining the main directions and aims" of talks on Abkhazia's future political status within Georgia to take place under the aegis of Russia and the UN. They also stressed Russia's continued readiness to mediate such a settlement. Russian CIS Affairs Minister Aman Tuleev, who was not present at the talks, told Interfax on 10 June he favors Ardzinba's proposal for a peace treaty between Abkhazia and Georgia modeled on the one signed by Chechnya and Russia.

06/11/1997 - Georgia seeks alternative mediators - RFE/RL:

Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the Georgian parliament's defense commission, said that Georgia will consider signing such a treaty only after the repatriation of Georgian refugees who fled Abkhazia and the holding of new elections there. Adamia accused Russia of resuming arms supplies to Abkhazia, Interfax reported. Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili called for an international conference on Abkhazia with the participation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Russia, the U.S., France, and Germany, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 11 June. Yurii Soslambekov, the chairman of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, told Interfax on 10 June that he advocates extending the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force currently deployed along the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. He added that if they are withdrawn, the confederation is prepared to send as many volunteers as necessary to replace them.

06/12/1997 - Georgian, Abkhaz representatives meet in Moscow - RFE/RL:

Georgian Ambassador to Russia Vazha Lortkipanidze and an Abkhaz delegation that included President Vladislav Ardzinba met in Moscow on 11 June to discuss a peace settlement, Interfax reported. Ardzinba told journalists later that a number of bilateral Abkhaz-Georgian agreements, including one on repairing the Inguri hydro-electric power station, are currently being drawn up. Col.-Gen. Andrei Nikolaev, the head of the Russian

Federal Border Service, told Interfax on 11 June that an eventual withdrawal from Abkhazia of the CIS peacekeeping force deployed there will not affect the Russian border troops stationed on the frontier between Abkhazia and Russia.

06/13/1997 - Georgian President welcomes Moscow talks on Abkhazia - RFE/RL:

Eduard Shevardnadze has welcomed the 11 June meetings between Georgian and Abkhaz representatives in Moscow, Interfax reported on 12 June. The Abkhaz delegation, headed by President Vladislav Ardzinba, also met with senior Russian officials. Shevardnadze, however, warned that the peace talks and peacekeeping forces should not serve to "legitimize ethnic cleansing or genocide" in Abkhazia. Interfax also reported that Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the Georgian parliamentary Defense and Security Committee, has accused Russia of resuming arms supplies to Abkhazia. Adamia said the fact that Ardzinba was received "at a high level" in Moscow should be interpreted as Moscow's support for the "separatist regime" in Abkhazia.

06/16/1997 - Georgian President endorses proposed Abkhazia conference - RFE/RL:

Eduard Shevardnadze has approved the proposal by his Ingush counterpart, Ruslan Aushev, to convene a UN-sponsored conference on Abkhazia chaired by Russian President Yeltsin, according to Interfax on 13 June. Presidential press spokesman Vakhtang Abashidze said Shevardnadze is ready to discuss this idea personally with Aushev, who advocated the participation at the peace conference of other North Caucasus leaders. Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba told "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 14 June that his recent talks in Moscow with Russian leaders focused on the text of a Georgian-Abkhaz protocol on restoring official relations, but not on Abkhazia's future status. Ardzinba greeted the proposed creation of an Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Caucasus and expressed the hope that the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force currently

deployed along the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia will be extended beyond 31 July.

06/17/1997 - Modest progress in Abkhaz talks ? - RFE/RL:

In his weekly radio address, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze said on 16 June that the ongoing talks in Moscow between Russian, Abkhaz, and Georgian representatives are no longer at a "standstill" and that his Abkhaz counterpart, Vladislav Ardzinba, is "seeking compromise solutions," Interfax reported. Shevardnadze reaffirmed his readiness to meet personally with Ardzinba. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 17 June similarly quoted Russian Foreign Ministry special envoy Gennadii Ilichev as saying a "certain" progress has been made. Russia rejects the Abkhaz argument that economic difficulties preclude the repatriation to Abkhazia of ethnic Georgians who fled the region in 1992-3. But it supports the Abkhaz refusal to condone the deployment of CIS peacekeepers throughout Gali Raion to which the Georgians wish to return.

06/23/1997 - Major progress at Georgian-Abkhaz talks ? - RFE/RL:

At the end of two-weeks of discussions between Georgia and Abkhazia, Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba said on 20 June in Moscow that the two sides agreed on a "possible formula" for settling the conflict, Interfax reported. Ardzinba added that a legal document might be signed "in the near future" to underpin that formula. According to Ardzinba, the Abkhaz side made a "maximum of concessions" and it was up to Georgia to respond. Georgian Ambassador to Moscow Vazha Lortkipanidze acknowledged that the prospects for peace were "far greater" as a result of the talks. An unidentified Russian Foreign Ministry official told Interfax that the agreements reached in Moscow would uphold Georgia's territorial integrity. But he added that another unspecified clause would act as a counterweight to that provision.

06/23/1997 - Abkhazia peace deal needs much work - Reuter:

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze said on Monday that after two weeks of intense talks with Abkhaz separatists the badly needed peace deal was still far from ready. "We came to agreement on some individual questions," Shevardnadze said in his weekly radio address. "Regardless of that, a giant amount of work remains and I think the Abkhaz understand that." Shevardnadze did not specify what questions had been resolved during the talks in Moscow which ended last Thursday. Georgian officials have not said when peace talks might resume. Pressure has grown to find a solution to the conflict as a July 31 deadline appears for a possible pullout of Russian peacekeepers from Abkhazia, raising fears of a renewal of the 1992-93 war which killed over 10,000 people. Georgia says it has lost patience with the Abkhaz after three years of talks and with the 2,500 Russian peacekeepers patrolling a buffer zone between the two sides. It has demanded the peacekeepers leave if they do not begin patrolling more of Abkhazia and help resettle some of the at least 150,000 Georgian refugees from the conflict who have still not been able to go home. The wider mandate was approved by the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States earlier this year but Russia says it wants Abkhazia to agree to the changes as well. Abkhazia has said it is bitterly opposed. The Abkhaz say they want independence or a "union state" of two equal partners. Georgia has rejected this, saying it would give the lush subtropical province international rights that it could later use to get full independence. It offers wide autonomy instead. Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba said last week that his side had made a maximum of compromises and that the ball was now in Tbilisi's court. Shevardnadze called for a larger role for the United Nations in helping settle the Abkhaz conflict. The UN has over 150 military observers in Abkhazia. The Black Sea region of Abkhazia has run itself as an independent state since its fighters, helped by volunteers and military support from Russia, drove out Georgian troops. No state has so far recognized Abkhazia. Georgia has scheduled what it says will be its largest military exercises ever close to the de facto frontier with Abkhazia for July. But

Shevardnadze says he has no intention of launching a new assault to recapture the region, but has warned that the Abkhaz would be committing "suicide" if they chose to go to war with his rebuilt army.

06/24/1997 - Duma against withdrawal of peacekeepers from Abkhazia - RFE/RL:

The Duma on 23 June adopted a resolution requesting that President Boris Yeltsin recommend the CIS leaders extend the Russian peacekeepers' mandate in Abkhazia, ITAR-TASS reported. The resolution said a withdrawal of the peacekeepers might lead to the resumption of war in Georgia's breakaway region, which, it stressed, would "inevitably" involve the peoples of Russia's North Caucasus. According to the Duma, such a scenario would endanger Russia's territorial integrity. Georgia has repeatedly accused the peacekeepers of not implementing the CIS summit's decision to give them a mandate to provide for the return of some 200,000 Georgian refugees. Tbilisi recently threatened not to prolong the peacekeepers' mandate, which is due to expire on 31 July, unless they comply with the CIS summit's decision.

06/25/1997 - Duma calls for ending blockade - RFE/RL:

The Duma on 25 June adopted a statement calling for the lifting of economic sanctions imposed on Abkhazia in 1995, ITAR-TASS reported. The sanctions include restrictions on crossing the frontier between Abkhazia and Russia and mandatory customs and frontier inspections in the Georgian port of Poti for all vessels wishing to dock in the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi. The Duma requested that speaker Gennadii Seleznev forward the statement to Yeltsin, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the heads of relevant government agencies.

Politique étrangère et commerce extérieur / Foreign policy and trade

04/01/1997 - Georgia adopts new security concept - RFE/RL:

The Georgian parliament has adopted new foreign-policy guidelines aimed at expediting the country's integration into European

structures, Russian new agencies reported yesterday. Parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania said the new concept reflects the current state of Georgia's relations with Russia, which he termed the main threat to Georgian security. Zhvania said that if Russia fails to assist Georgia in restoring control over the breakaway republic of Abkhazia, Georgia will revise its present policy of military cooperation with Russia.

04/11/1997 - Georgia hosts « Traseca » conference - RFE/RL:

The European Commission and the Georgian government have sponsored a conference on reviving the historic "Silk Road," which ran from China via Central Asia, the Transcaucasus, and Turkey to Europe, Russian agencies reported. Participants in the conference, which opened in Tbilisi on 8 April, include the deputy premiers and transport ministers of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation member countries and IMF and EBRD representatives. The so called TRASECA project foresees the expansion of existing road, rail, and telecommunications links as well as ferry services across the Caspian and Black Seas. It could earn Georgia more than \$300 million in transit tariffs in 1998 alone. Although the proposed transport routes do not cross Russian territory, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze favors Russian participation in the project.

04/23/1997 - Kyrgyz president supports Traseca project, Lukashenka proposes alternative - RFE/RL:

Askar Akayev and his Georgian counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze, held talks in Tbilisi yesterday that focused on strengthening bilateral relations and cooperating in transportation, RFE/RL's bureau in the Georgian capital reported. Akayev stressed the importance to Kyrgyzstan of the TRASECA road and rail project that will link China, Central Asia, and the Transcaucasus with Europe. Kyrgyzstan has received a \$140 million loan from Japan to finance its participation in the project. Meanwhile, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka proposed in Seoul yesterday the creation of a Beijing-Moscow-Minsk transport corridor "not only as a victory for the

economy but as a response to NATO enlargement," Interfax reported. Belarusian economists say the corridor would constitute a cheaper and safer way of transporting Chinese goods to the CIS and Europe than existing routes.

04/28/1997 - Interior ministers of Georgia and Armenia discuss cooperation - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Concrete problems of boosting further cooperation between the Georgian and Armenian law enforcement agencies were discussed at the Georgian Interior Minister Kakhi Targamadze's meeting with the Interior and National Security Minister of Armenia Serzh Sargsian. The sides voiced satisfaction over the expanded and boosted cooperation between Georgia and Armenia. It was noted that as a result of this cooperation the criminal situation in borderlands had improved and order roads and railroads had been restored, Caucasus-press agency reported.

04/30/1997 - Armenian, Georgian bilateral relations discussed at meeting - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

First Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Vartan Oskanian met with his Georgian counterpart Mikhail Ouklebu Tuesday, as the two leaders discussed preparations for Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze's upcoming visit to Armenia, which is scheduled to take place in early May as well as prospects and possibilities of bilateral cooperation within the guidelines of the Council of Europe and other European structures. Oskanian and Ouklebu also stressed the need for bilateral relations to be systematic, and outlined the need to further those prospects. The two leaders also addressed problems of regional cooperation, particularly emphasizing the importance of integrating the Transcaucasian States into European structures.

05/01/1997 - Georgian Party opposes Georgia-Turkey railway - Fact (Asbarez-on-line):

The Social-Democratic Party of Georgia issued an announcement

Wednesday vehemently opposing proposed plans for a Georgia-Turkey railway project. The party stressed that the planned project would transform Georgia into a clearinghouse for Turkish products, a move which could destabilize Georgia's national economy. The announcement also outlined that the proposed railway could halt operations of the Poti and Batumi ports, which for decades have been Georgia's gateway to the world, arguing that cargo would be directed straight to Turkey from the east. The most important issue of note in the announcement was a foreseen threat of Turkification of the Georgian population. The Social-Democratic party also urged Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze to carefully address this grievance.

05/05/1997 - Georgian President in Armenia - RFE/RL:

Eduard Shevardnadze and his Armenian counterpart, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, have affirmed their readiness to broaden bilateral cooperation and to support multilateral regional cooperation in implementing the TRASECA "Silk Road" project. Shevardnadze was in Yerevan on 2 and 3 May for talks with Armenian officials. In a joint communique, the two presidents also affirmed support for cooperation within the CIS and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The communique, however, did not mention the 200,000-strong Armenian minority in southern Georgia, which is lobbying for autonomy. Shevardnadze had told RFE/RL's Armenian service on 1 May that Georgia's relations with Armenia are "excellent." Meanwhile, Interfax reported on 3 May that Shevardnadze, who will be 70 next January, intends to run for president in 2000.

05/15/1997 - L'Italie souhaite aider la Géorgie à s'intégrer à l'Europe - AFP:

L'Italie souhaite soutenir les efforts de la Géorgie pour adhérer à l'Union européenne, a indiqué jeudi le président du Conseil italien Romano Prodi au terme d'un entretien à Rome avec le président géorgien Eduard Chevardnadze. « L'Italie souhaite favoriser l'intégration (aux institutions européennes) des pays du sud-est

du continent européen », a affirmé M. Prodi au cours d'une conférence de presse conjointe avec le président géorgien. M. Chevardnadze a salué de son côté l'accord entre l'OTAN et la Russie sur l'élargissement de l'alliance au pays de l'Est de l'Europe. Cela confirme, a dit le président géorgien, qu'en matière de sécurité « il ne faut pas dramatiser » les différences mais « travailler pour trouver un compromis ». L'Italie et la Géorgie ont signé dix accords bilatéraux à l'occasion de la visite de M. Chevardnadze à Rome. Le président géorgien a également rencontré le ministre italien des Affaires étrangères Lamberto Dini. Au terme de la rencontre, le ministre italien a indiqué que l'Italie examinait la possibilité d'ouvrir une ambassade à Tbilissi.

05/19/1997 - Georgian President invites Pope to visit - RFE/RL:

At a meeting in the Vatican on 16 May, Eduard Shevardnadze invited Pope John Paul II to visit Georgia, AFP reported. Shevardnadze also held talks in Rome with Italian leaders and with officials of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, which will implement a special program to increase agricultural production and crop yields in Georgia, according to ITAR-TASS. A declaration on political and economic cooperation and several bilateral agreements were signed, including one on military cooperation, Interfax reported.

05/21/1997 - Georgian-Chechen tensions - RFE/RL:

Ruslan Kutaev, special emissary of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, is currently in Georgia trying to defuse tensions among the Chechen population of Georgia's Akhmeta Raion, Nezavisimaya gazeta reports today. The tensions arose after the Georgian government established a road police checkpoint outside a village where some 1,000 ethnic Chechen families live.

05/26/1997 - Georgian Premier in Tashkent - RFE/RL:

Niko Lekishvili held talks in the Uzbek capital on 23 May with President Islam Karimov and other officials on cooperation in transport, communications, and trade,

Russian agencies reported. Karimov expressed interest in the TRASECA transport corridor, which will facilitate the export of Uzbek goods from the Georgian Black Sea port of Poti. Georgia wants to receive natural gas from Uzbekistan. An agreement whereby Uzbekistan will supply Georgia with cotton fiber has been delayed pending the approval of the IMF.

05/28/1997 - Georgia, Ukraine sign agreements on military cooperation - RFE/RL:

Georgian Defense Minister Vardiko Nadibaidze and his Ukrainian counterpart, Aleksandr Kuzmuk, signed six agreements in Tbilisi on 27 May. ITAR-TASS and BS-Press reported. The accords cover cooperation between the two countries' air forces and air defense systems and the training of Georgian military personnel in Ukraine. Kuzmuk reiterated that Ukraine supports Georgia's claim to part of the Black Sea Fleet.

05/28/1997 - Georgia to host Cossack gathering - RFE/RL:

The Council of Atamans of Cossack Forces of Russia and Abroad will convene in Tbilisi in July to coordinate its position on the settlement of conflicts in the former USSR, according to Nezavisimaya gazeta on 28 May. Ranking Russian Cossack leaders discussed preparations for the congress in Tbilisi with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze and the leader of the Georgian Cossack Force, Vasilii Kadenets. The convention is clearly part of Shevardnadze's "Peaceful Caucasus" initiative and aims to promote cooperation between Georgia and Russia's North Caucasus republics.

05/30/1997 - Georgia loses out over Black Sea fleet division - RFE/RL:

The 28 May agreement on the division of the Black Sea Fleet between Russia and Ukraine did not meet Tbilisi's demand for 32 naval vessels formerly stationed at Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti. Ukraine had supported that demand. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze told a news conference in the capital on 28 May that Georgia has contributed to the

creation and upkeep of the fleet and therefore has the same rights to a share in it as Russia and Ukraine, according to RIA Novosti. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov said on 29 May that Georgia has no right to claim part of the fleet, Interfax reported. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Valerii Nesterushkin said the original agreement on dividing the fleet was taken at a meeting of CIS heads of state in January 1992. Georgia was not a member of the CIS at that time.

06/02/1997 - Georgia continues to demand share of Black Sea fleet - RFE/RL:

National Security adviser Archil Gegeshidze, presidential spokesman Vakhtang Abashidze, and Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili continued on 30-31 May to insist that Georgia has a rightful claim to part of the Black Sea Fleet, Russian agencies reported. Gegeshidze told Interfax that Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov's statement on 29 May that Georgia received vessels from Ukraine's share of the fleet was incorrect. He added that Kyiv's transfer of one patrol boat to Georgia in April was merely a "goodwill gesture." Russian presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembskii told journalists on 30 May that Russia does not recognize Georgia's claims, ITAR-TASS reported.

06/05/1997 - Georgia backs Chechen proposal for Caucasian OSCE - RFE/RL:

Parliamentary chairman Zhvania expressed support on 4 June for the creation of a Caucasian inter-parliamentary assembly modeled on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, ITAR-TASS reported. This idea has been discussed intermittently in recent years and was again raised on 31 May by Chechen delegates to a conference of North Caucasus leaders in Kislovodsk (see RFE/RL Newsline, 2 June 1997). Segodnya on 4 June reported that the creation of a Caucasian equivalent of the OSCE with international status was discussed during talks the previous day between Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Movladi Udugov and Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin. This suggests that

Russia aspires to leadership of the proposed organization. Some Georgian parliamentary deputies have argued that Russia should not be granted membership.

Politique intérieure et droits de l'homme / Domestic policy and human rights

04/01/1997 - A coalition of Gamsakhurdia supporters in Georgia - RFE/RL:

Nine Georgian opposition parties representing supporters of former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia have overcome internal dissent to create a coalition called the Front for the Reinstatement of Legitimate Power in Georgia, Interfax reported on 27 March. On 31 March, Gamsakhurdia's birthday, his supporters staged demonstrations in several districts of Tbilisi to demand the resignation of the Shevardnadze leadership and the withdrawal from Georgia of all Russian troops, Russian TV reported.

04/18/1997 - Georgian warlord says Shevardnadze witnessed 1993 executions - RFE/RL:

Dzhaba Ioseliani, former head of the disbanded Mkhedrioni paramilitary force, says he was arrested in November 1995 because he had informed the Georgian parliament that he was present when Interior Minister Shota Kviraya executed five men in Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze's presence. Ioseliani said the executions were carried out in western Georgia in October 1993. The date and place suggests that the executed men were supporters of late President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who launched an unsuccessful insurrection in fall 1993. Ioseliani has been charged with treason in connection with the failed car bomb attack on Shevardnadze in August 1995. He protests that his arrest was illegal because, as a deputy, he had parliamentary immunity.

04/24/1997 - Georgia's social democrats propose frontier changes - RFE/RL:

The Social Democratic Party wants President Eduard Shevardnadze to take advantage of Georgia's harmonious relations with

Azerbaijan by asking President Aliiev to return Saingilo to Georgia, BS-Press reported yesterday. The Saingilo region comprises three raions on Azerbaijan's northern frontier that were part of the former kingdom of eastern Georgia. During the 1980s, Saingilo's Georgian population compiled samizdat documentation protesting discrimination by the Azerbaijani authorities.

04/25/1997 - Mkhedrioni member confesses to involvement in political assassinations - RFE/RL:

Gocha Tediashvili, a member of the banned paramilitary organization Mkhedrioni, told the Georgian Supreme Court on 23 April that he was involved in the murders of three prominent Georgian political figures, Interfax reported yesterday. Tediashvili confessed to having taken part in the 1994 killings of Deputy Interior Minister Giorgi Gulua, Shevardnadze Fund President Soliko Khabeishvili, and Georgian National Democratic Party leader Gia Chanturia.

06/09/1997 - Georgian Prosecutor brings charges in connection with Shevardnadze assassination attempt - RFE/RL:

Dzhamlet Babilashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on 6 June that four men have been charged with treason in connection with the bomb attack on Georgian head of state Eduard Shevardnadze in August 1995, RFE/RL's Tbilisi bureau reported. Babilashvili said that the assassination attempt was planned by former Georgian security service chief Igor Giorgadze and Mkhedrioni leader Dzhaba Ioseliani, who had worked with Russian intelligence agents to eliminate Shevardnadze and install Giorgadze as Georgia's leader.

06/19/1997 - Georgia's security ministry accused of phone-tapping - RFE/RL:

Irina Sarishvili, the leader of the National Democratic Party, has accused the State Security Ministry of tapping telephone conversations of Nodar Grigalashvili, editor-in-chief of the opposition newspaper "Sakartvelo," Interfax reported on 18 June. Sarishvili submitted to a Georgian parliamentary committee what she called transcripts of the

editor's telephone conversations, signed by State Security Minister Shota Kviraya. Grigalashvili confirmed that the "transcripts" were authentic. Earlier, Sarishvili had accused Kviraya of collaborating with the Russian security services.

HAUT-KARABAKH / NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Conflit du Karabakh / Karabakh conflict

04/01/1997 - New round of Karabakh talks opens in Moscow - RFE/RL:

Yeltsin met with his counterparts from Armenia and Azerbaijan, Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Heidar Aliiev, in Moscow on 29 March to discuss prospects for resolving the Karabakh conflict. In Paris last week, the U.S., Russian, and French co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group has "outlined a common approach" to the round of talks that opens on 1 April in Moscow, Armenpress reported. Last week, the Foreign Ministry of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh issued a statement calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict based on the right of nations to self-determination.

04/01/1997 - De Charette on Karabakh talks - RFE/RL:

French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette told Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan in Yerevan earlier this week that he favors direct talks between Baku and Yerevan and possibly between Baku and Stepanakert in order to expedite a solution to the Karabakh conflict, RFE/RL reported. De Charette also disclosed that Iran, which is not an OSCE member and is therefore excluded from the mediation process, is pleased France has become one of the three co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group. Gasparyan praised Russia's role as "an honest and impartial" co-mediator, but he complained that Azerbaijan is trying to undermine Russia's role in the mediation process.

04/03/1997 - Karabakh mission inaugurated in France - Asbarez-on-line:

A visiting delegation led by Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Acting President Leonard Petrosian, attended ceremonies Tuesday for the inauguration of the republic's mission in Paris. Accompanying Petrosian were Karabakh representative in Armenia Alexander Harutunian, representative of the Armenian Embassy in France Ruben Kharazyan and Karabakh's representative to the European Parliament and Council Varoujan Grigorian. Also present at the ceremony were members and leaders of Armenian organizations, members of French and Armenian press as well as French political officials. Petrosian emphasized the importance of the Karabakh mission in Paris, since the center aimed to be a link between Karabakh and the French Armenian community, and expressed hope that when the international community recognizes the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, this center could become an embassy.

04/08/1997 - No progress, but new impetus in Karabakh talks - RFE/RL:

The Minsk Group talks in Moscow last week on a settlement of the Karabakh conflict made no progress toward agreement on any key points, Interfax reported yesterday. But the Nagorno-Karabakh delegation did agree "in principle" to the repatriation of Azerbaijanis who fled during the fighting. A Western diplomat involved in the talks told RFE/RL that although Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to occupy "maximalist" positions, the meeting gave new impetus to the talks, which had been deadlocked since November 1996. The talks were attended by co-chairmen from Russia, the U.S., and France and delegations from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The three co-chairmen warned that all sides in the conflict "must make an effort to achieve movement toward a real settlement."

04/08/1997 - Oskanian says no inroads at Karabakh peace talks - Yerevan News Service (Asbarez-on-line):

Armenia's Deputy Foreign minister Vartan Oskanian Tuesday held a press conference at the foreign ministry where he announced that

the most recent Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk Group Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks yielded no tangible results. Oskanian stated that there were no changes in the discussion on the so-called Grand Political Agreement or a comprehensive accord for a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The deputy foreign minister explained that during the first three days of talks, discussions centered around the sides to the conflict and the three co-chairman-Troika-of the Minsk Group, while on the fourth day, the entire nine-member group met, following which the sides and the Minsk Group met jointly and addressed issues concerning humanitarian concerns, Lachin, Shoushi and the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The humanitarian concerns centered on a directive by the troika on the release of all prisoners of war and hostages based on lists provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Oskanian said that this proposal was already being implemented. Oskanian added that discussion on Lachin and Shoushi, which Azerbaijan has categorized as "occupied territories," did not yield any results. Armenia and Karabakh proposed that the Shoushi issue be completely taken out of the agenda and the comprehensive political accord. The Armenian sides have rationalized that Shoushi is an indivisible part of Nagorno-Karabakh and that throughout the conflict, Azeris have abandoned the city, although they reserve the right to return after peace is established in the region. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, demanded that Shoushi be granted special status and be monitored by international peace keeping forces. This proposal was rejected by Armenia and Karabakh. There were no changes on the Lachin issue. Armenia emphasized the importance of Lachin as a security belt and proposed that it remain under Karabakh control until the end of the conflict. Azerbaijan, however, categorized Lachin as an "occupied territory," but agreed that Lachin should be controlled by international forces during a troop withdrawal transition. Oskanian expressed his frustration on the lack of general-or specific-discussion on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. He stated that Azerbaijan proposed that Armenia

adhere to the now infamous so-called Lisbon "principles," at which time direct Azeri-Karabakh negotiations would be possible. Oskanian stated that Armenia's position of not negotiation without the participation of Karabakh, the issue was, once again, deadlocked.

04/09/1997 - Two Azeris killed in clash on Armenian border - RFE/RL:

Armenian forces opened fire on four unidentified men trying to cross the border from Azerbaijan earlier this week, AP reported yesterday. Two men were killed, while the others retreated. Although there are exchanges of fire along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border almost every month, this is the first time in over a year that casualties have been reported. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani parliament has sent a letter to the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly arguing that Russia's policy of clandestinely supplying arms to Armenia shows it cannot be an impartial mediator in the Karabakh conflict, according to Interfax yesterday. Addressing a news conference in Yerevan yesterday on the OSCE-mediated Karabakh talks in Moscow last week, Armenian First Deputy Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said the Azerbaijani negotiating position has hardened, making progress unlikely.

04/10/1997 - Petrosian says Karabakh cannot remain in Azerbaijan - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

The Karabakh leadership will maintain its continuity of internal and foreign policy and continue to participate in negotiations to achieve international recognition, said Karabakh Prime Minister Leonard Petrosian during a press conference Wednesday devoted to the situation in Karabakh after Robert Kocharian's resignation as president and appointment as Prime Minister of Armenia. "Karabakh will stand up for the people's just demand," he added. Petrosian noted that it was necessary to go on building a civil and democratic society and establish a legislative base. According to Petrosian, the ideology should be based on the model of man-state cooperation. Speaking of early presidential polls in Karabakh, Leonard Petrosian

noted that it is likely that the present laws be amended, in order to delay the election. Petrosian said that this delay would enable the presidential candidates to get prepared for the election campaign. The Minister did not rule out that a vice-presidential post be established in Karabakh. These issues will be brought for consideration at the Karabakh Parliament, Petrosian said. As for the current stage of negotiations over the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, Leonard Petrosian noted that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Chairman's statement in Lisbon predetermined Karabakh's future political status. According to Petrosian, the statement resulted in toughening Azerbaijan's position in negotiation talks. "Karabakh cannot remain within Azerbaijan and can have only parallel relations with Azerbaijan," said Leonard Petrosian. He noted that Karabakh's existence as an enclave is inadmissible. "Nagorno Karabakh should decide the degree of its safety on its own," the Prime Minister added. In this respect, the Prime Minister emphasized the importance of strengthening the Karabakh army as this would be the only security guarantee of Karabakh and its people.

04/11/1997 - Two more Azerbaijanis killed in border shooting - RFE/RL:

Two Azerbaijanis were shot dead last night trying to cross the frontier into Armenia's Izhdevan Raion, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported today, citing a Defense Ministry press release. Armenian troops returned Azerbaijani fire and then gave warning shots as three men tried to cross the border. There were no Armenian casualties. Interfax yesterday quoted an Azerbaijani Defense Ministry spokesman as denying reports that two Azerbaijani troops were killed in a border shooting earlier this week.

04/11/1997 - 7 soldats azerbaïdjanais tués - AFP:

Sept soldats azerbaïdjanais ont été tués jeudi par les forces militaires arméniennes, alors qu'ils tentaient de passer la frontière entre les deux pays, a-t-on indiqué vendredi de source arménienne, citée par l'agence Interfax. Selon le service de presse du ministère de la

Défense arménien, une unité de reconnaissance azérie a tenté jeudi de s'introduire dans le territoire arménien par le nord-est du pays. Les forces militaires arméniennes sont alors intervenues en ouvrant le feu sur les soldats azerbaïdjanais, causant la mort de sept d'entre eux. Le reste de la troupe a pu se replier en territoire azerbaïdjanais, a-t-on précisé de même source.

04/16/1997 - Prisoner of war exchange halted by Azeris - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

The exchange of prisoners of war which was planned for Thursday may not take place, according to an Azeri ANS-press agency citing the Azeri State Commission on POWs. Following information provided by the State Committee, the reason for the cancellation is Armenia's demand to include Karen Gevorgyan in the list of POWs. Gevorgyan is charged with a crime committed in January 1997. The Azeri State Commission appealed to the International Committee of the Red Cross requesting the exclusion of criminals from the list of POWs. However, Gevorgyan is included in the ICRC list of POWs. Release of the POWs became possible after a joint statement by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group which stated that all those included in the ICRC lists must be released, including Gevorgyan.

Les autorités azéries retardent l'échange des prisonniers de guerre.

04/17/1997 - Russian arms deals will not effect Karabakh talks - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

National Assembly Speaker Babken Ararktsian met with the Speaker of the Council of Federation of Russia Yegor Stroyev in Moscow Wednesday. At a news conference after the meeting, Stroyev said that the scandal over the Russian weapons supply to Armenia will not have an effect on Russia's participation in the Karabakh negotiations. He said that Russian President Boris Yeltsin had ordered the Prosecutor's Office to investigate the alleged illegal weapons supply. Stroyev said that a new Armenian-Russian Union treaty should not be signed in a hurry because there was still work underway and changes were still

being introduced. "Don't forget that Armenia is not an alien country for us. It is close to us both spiritually and mentally. It is the only country supporting our position towards NATO. Armenia adopted Christianity in the 4th century, Russia in the 10th, so we are of the same religion," Stroyev said. He said that the surplus in food production in all regions of the Northern Caucasus of the Russian Federation will be shared with Armenia because they (Armenia) are paying three times as much for imported food products from abroad. Ararktsian said that Armenia and Russia are on such good terms that the alleged weapons scandal would not have an effect on them. Ararktsian said that among other problems he discussed with Stroyev were the possibilities of settling the Karabakh conflict within the guidelines of the Commonwealth of Independent States Interparliamentary Assembly. The Bishkek agreement was signed at this Assembly in 1994. The signing of the agreement is the reason why there has been three years of peace in Karabakh.

04/18/1997 - Karabakh : OSCE official shot at in Fizouli - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Quoting Azeri defense ministry, the Turan news agency Wednesday reported about an incident in the southern region of the Nagorno-Karabakh, where according to the report, Karabakh armed units allegedly shelled a car, which was transporting Andrey Kasprczik, OSCE acting chairman's envoy. In this connection Karabakh acting President Leonard Petrossian held a meeting Thursday with Mark Skovgard, a field assistant to the OSCE acting chairman's envoy. Government spokesperson Leonid Martirossian informed that during the talk the sides noted the importance of maintaining cease-fire in the conflict area. Petrossian reaffirmed the commitment of Nagorno-Karabakh to observe peace. Commenting on the information by the Turan news agency which quoted Kasprczik as accusing the Karabakh side, Skovgard pointed out that the views expressed in the report could not be taken for the OSCE's point of view. It is rather the result of the work of agency's editor-in-chief, said Skovgard. He also informed that the

OSCE was proceeding with its inquiry to clear up all circumstances of the incident. According to him, consultations between envoy Kasprczik and the OSCE's acting chairman are being held simultaneously. The OSCE envoy stressed that such publications only hindered the peaceful process to the Karabakh crisis and the establishment of lasting peace in the region. Spokesperson of Armenia's defense ministry, Hovhannes Charkchian declared that no one has opened fire in the direction of the OSCE vehicle from Armenian territory. Although the two sides had agreed upon monitoring that particular region, according to Karabakh officials, the task was made difficult after two groups of Azeri infiltrators were discovered. Only one has been caught and deported, while the second group is still being sought. An investigation, requested by the Azeri side, revealed that fire was not opened by the Armenian side.

04/19/1997 - Libération de cinq Arméniens, selon le CICR - AFP:

Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (CICR) a annoncé samedi à Genève la libération ce même jour de cinq civils arméniens par l'Azerbaïdjan dans le conflit du Haut-Karabakh. Les prisonniers ont été libérés « unilatéralement » a précisé le CICR qui a affrété un avion pour effectuer leur transfert entre Bakou et Erevan. Une première série de libération s'était déroulée le 5 avril et avait permis à quatre militaires azerbaïdjanais et six civils arméniens de retrouver leurs pays. En outre, un détenu avait été libéré par les autorités azerbaïdjanaises et transféré vers la Fédération de Russie. Ces trois opérations de libération s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'un appel lancé par les trois co-présidents du Groupe de Minsk de l'OSCE, soit les Etats-Unis, la Fédération de Russie et la France, a rappelé le CICR. Le CICR se déclare confiant sur la suite des libérations « dont la prochaine phase devrait concerner dix militaires détenus à Bakou et à Stépanakert/Khankendi ».

04/21/1997 - Fighting intensifies on Armenian-Azerbaijani frontier - RFE/RL:

Up to 50 troops are reported killed in recent fighting between Armenian

and Azerbaijani forces in two locations, Russian agencies reported. During the night from 18 to 19 April, Karabakh Armenian forces opened artillery fire on a village in Azerbaijan's Aghdjabed Raion, ITAR-TASS reported, quoting the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry. Armenian and Azerbaijani Defense Ministry spokesmen each accused the other side of launching an artillery bombardment on the northern section of the border between Armenia's Tavush Raion and Azerbaijan's Kazakh Raion early on 19 April. Interfax yesterday quoted a source in Baku as saying that fighting was continuing, but the Armenian Defense Ministry denied this was the case, according to Reuters. In a 18 April telephone conversation, the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents had agreed to order their respective military commands to abide strictly by the 1994 cease fire agreement, Interfax and Turan reported.

04/21/1997 - Nouveaux échanges de tirs à la frontière arméno-azérie - AFP:

Arméniens et Azerbaïdjanais se sont de nouveau accusés lundi de violations du cessez-le-feu dimanche soir, après deux jours d'accrochages à la frontière qui ont fait plusieurs dizaines de victimes des deux côtés, selon l'Azerbaïdjan. Les deux camps se sont accusés mutuellement d'avoir ouvert le feu sur des positions militaires adverses. Les Azerbaïdjanais ont fait état d'un blessé. L'Arménie a cependant nié le bilan d'une cinquantaine de morts et de blessés fourni par l'Azerbaïdjan pour les affrontements du week-end. « L'Azerbaïdjan diffuse ce genre de rapports mensongers chaque fois qu'elle prépare des hostilités à large échelle contre l'Arménie », a déclaré le porte-parole du ministère de la Défense arménien Ovik Tcharkhtchian, cité par Interfax. « Actuellement, il ne se passe rien d'inhabituel à la frontière », a affirmé pour sa part le porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères Arsèn Gasparian, « de petits incidents sont courants depuis l'instauration du cessez-le-feu. On ne peut pas parler de tension de la situation ». Les Arméniens ont cependant accusé les troupes azerbaïdjanaises d'avoir tiré dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi sur les forces armées arméniennes

stationnées à la frontière, sans faire ni victimes ni dégâts. Côté azerbaïdjanais, un porte-parole du ministère de la Défense a déclaré que « le cessez-le-feu est violé pratiquement chaque jour par la partie arménienne depuis le 15 avril. Dimanche soir les forces armées arméniennes stationnées dans le village de Mossekikh (...) ont tiré, avec toutes sortes d'armes sur les troupes azerbaïdjanaises situées à la frontière, faisant un blessé. Les tirs ont été arrêtés après une riposte des troupes azerbaïdjanaises ». Vendredi, les présidents arménien Levon Ter Petrossian et azerbaïdjanais Gueïdar Aliev avaient évoqué par téléphone les échanges de tirs entre leurs deux pays, qui sont devenus fréquents depuis peu, et avaient souhaité le respect du cessez-le-feu.

04/22/1997 - New ICRC head introduced to Petrosian - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line) # Karabakh official meets NGO's - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line)

The outgoing Head of the International Committee of Red Cross' Stepanakert-based office Sergio Sales introduced his successor Stephan Muller to Acting President Leonard Petrosian Sunday. Sales expressed his gratitude to the Karabakh authorities for good working conditions and assistance to the ICRC office. Petrosian thanked Sales for his fruitful work and voiced hope for further cooperation between the Karabakh authorities and the ICRC to remedy the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a meeting with various Karabakh non-governmental entities, Acting President Leonard Petrosian stressed the importance of the development and creation of all types of NGO's in order to strengthen the democratic base of Karabakh. Expressing their gratitude to the Karabakh authorities for good working conditions, the participants of the seminar informed Petrosian about the course and the results of the meeting of non-governmental organizations of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as about prospects for cooperation aimed at developing joint projects

dealing with the building of civil society and social life.

04/22/1997 - Les « 40 » souhaitent la création d'une Communauté des Etats transcaucasiens - AFP:

L'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe s'est prononcée mardi à Strasbourg pour la création à terme d'une Communauté des Etats transcaucasiens réunissant l'Arménie, l'Azerbaïdjan et la Géorgie. Ces trois pays, qui bénéficient auprès de l'Assemblée du statut d'invité spécial et demandent leur adhésion à part entière au Conseil de l'Europe, doivent signer vendredi une convention culturelle du Conseil de l'Europe. Dans une résolution, l'Assemblée parlementaire estime que le règlement politique des conflits en Transcaucasie doit reposer sur les principes d'inviolabilité des frontières, de garantie des zones concernées, d'un statut de large autonomie à négocier pour l'Abkhazie et le Haut-Karabakh et du retour des réfugiés. La création d'une communauté transcaucasienne contribuerait à l'instauration d'une paix durable et faciliterait la libre circulation des hommes et des marchandises dans la région, selon David Atkinson (GB, conservateur). Pour le rapporteur Jean Seitlinger (France, UDF), l'Assemblée doit avant tout se pencher sur le sort des 1,3 à 1,5 million de réfugiés des pays transcaucasiens, sur 12 millions d'habitants, à la suite des conflits en Abkhazie et au Haut-Karabakh.

04/23/1997 - OSCE eager to resolve Karabakh conflict - Azg daily/Armenpress (Asbarez-on-line):

Co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk group plan to resolve the Karabakh conflict as soon as possible. According to a report by Itar Tass, Russian co-chairman Yuri Yukalov made this declaration on behalf of his French and US colleagues, after meeting with Gaidar Aliyev Tuesday. Yukalov said that the co-chairmen hope for a quick resolution of the conflict based on the principles of the Lisbon Summit. Aliyev declared that Azerbaijan is very interested in resolving the conflict. He said that recent incidents at the borders, resulting in losses from both sides, are not violations of the cease-fire, which

have been in effect since May 1994. Concrete proposals for resolution of the conflict were discussed behind closed doors. No details are available about Yukalov's meeting with Aliyev.

04/25/1997 - State Department concerned over border fighting - Asbarez-on-line:

The US State Department Tuesday expressed concern Tuesday over escalating military tension on Armenian-Azeri border. During a press briefing, State Department Spokesperson Nicholas Burns said the following: "The US is deeply concerned about recent reports of firing along the northern Armenian-Azerbaijani border. These reports, covering a series of incidents over the past week, pose a serious threat to the almost three-year old cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh and to the search for a peace in the region".

04/25/1997 - OSCE suspends monitoring of Karabakh cease-fire - RFE/RL:

Danish Foreign Minister and OSCE chairman Niels Helveg Petersen said yesterday that the organization has suspended its regular monitoring of the front-line between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, in southern Azerbaijan, RFE/RL reported. The decision was prompted by an incident on 15 April when the car transporting an OSCE monitor was fired on near the Azerbaijani town of Horadiz. Also yesterday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadii Tarasov expressed concern at cease-fire violations over the past three weeks, according to Interfax. The Armenian and Azerbaijani Defense Ministries each accused the opposing side of opening fire on enemy positions.

04/28/1997 - Armenia, Karabakh NGO's to cooperate - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Because NGO's of Nagorno-Karabakh cannot fully implement their programs due to the lack of the international recognition of the Republic, such organizations have established the understanding of cooperating with their Armenian counterparts in order to be able to serve the people of Nagorno-Karabakh better. The first step to achieve such cooperation was the workshop "Three Years of Peace:

Reality and Prospects" held in Karabakh last week. The workshop was attended by representatives of Armenia's Sociological Association, Christian Association of Young People of Armenia, the Young Democrats Organization, All-Armenia Women's Union, Committees of Helsinki Citizen Assembly of Armenia and Karabakh and the Maternity Committee of Karabakh, among others. Natalya Martirosian, coordinator of the Committee of Helsinki Citizen Assembly of Armenia and coordinator of the Armenian Women's Union, characterized the Stepanakert meeting as a new stage in development of Karabakh and Armenian NGO's. According to her, the main result of the workshop is the establishment of horizontal relations between NGO's of the two republics, and a decision on joint participation in definite programs. The NGO's of Armenia and Karabakh reached a preliminary agreement on joint participation in organization of summer camps for children, establishment of a summer youth camp in Dadivank (Karabakh) and projects to help in sanitation of the zone. The workshop was organized by the Karabakh Committee "Helsinki Initiative-92" through the assistance of the Nagorno-Karabakh Government.

04/28/1997 - Pas de percée sur le Karabakh entre MM. Aliyev et Ter Petrossian - AFP:

Une rencontre lundi à Istanbul entre les présidents azerbaïdjanais et arménien Gueïdar Aliyev et Levon Ter Petrossian n'a pas permis de progresser vers une solution au conflit du Haut-Karabakh, a-t-on indiqué de source arménienne. Les deux présidents se sont entretenus en tête-à-tête pendant 40 minutes, à l'initiative du président turc Suleyman Demirel. MM. Aliyev et Ter Petrossian se trouvent à Istanbul pour participer à une conférence d'affaires des pays membres de la Coopération économique en mer Noire (CEN), à laquelle participent sept chefs d'Etat. Une partie des projets économiques de la région Caucase-mer Noire, pétroliers et gaziers notamment, exigent une solution au conflit du Karabakh pour pouvoir être menés à bien. L'entretien de lundi était le premier de MM. Aliyev et Ter Petrossian sous l'égide de la Turquie. Celle-ci

soutient généralement l'Azerbaïdjan musulman turcophone et a fermé sa frontière terrestre avec l'Arménie.

05/01/1997 - Karabakh : la Russie, les Etats-Unis et la France unissent leurs efforts - AFP:

La Russie, les Etats-Unis et la France, à la tête d'une mission de médiation pour le Haut-Karabakh, ont décidé jeudi de préparer en commun un projet de solution en faveur de ce territoire disputé par l'Azerbaïdjan et l'Arménie, a indiqué un haut responsable français. Des représentants des trois pays « se reverront en principe à la mi-mai à Washington pour arrêter des positions communes » sur le Haut-Karabakh, a déclaré à l'AFP le diplomate français Jacques Blot. Cette décision a été prise jeudi à Moscou lors d'une réunion entre le ministre russe des Affaires étrangères Evguéni Primakov, le secrétaire d'Etat américain Madeleine Albright et les trois co-présidents - russe, américain et français - de la Conférence de Minsk. La Russie, les Etats-Unis et la France « ont souligné jeudi la nécessité d'établir une forte cohérence pour essayer de débloquent les négociations, bloquées depuis plusieurs mois », a indiqué M. Blot, co-président de la Conférence côté français. Les deux semaines à venir, d'ici la prochaine réunion tripartite à Washington seront mises à profit pour préparer « des propositions de méthodes de négociation et des solutions précises », selon M. Blot. « Nous avons bon espoir que le processus (de négociation) bénéficiera d'une nouvelle impulsion », a commenté pour sa part le porte-parole du Département d'Etat américain, Nicholas Burns.

05/01/1997 - Karabakh wants OSCE presence - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

Nagorno-Karabakh Acting President Leonard Petrossian confirmed his country's willingness to offer security for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's mission in the area controlled by the Karabakh Army. At a meeting with the OSCE Chairman's envoy, Andrei Kasprczik, Petrossian stressed that the Karabakh army is only interested in the OSCE's and other international peace promoting

organizations' presence in the conflict zone. They also discussed the recent incident in the southern sector of the during which the car in which Kasprozik was traveling in was fired upon. They said that the improvement of their data exchange process and monitoring technicalities would avoid such incidents in the future. The OSCE envoy also met with the Karabakh Defense Minister Samvel Babayan. They discussed a wide range of military and political problems associated with the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, as well as measures to maintain the cease-fire.

05/09/1997 - Aliiev threatens force to regain occupied territory - RFE/RL:

Aliiev told a meeting in Izmir on 7 May that if a peaceful settlement to the Karabakh conflict is not reached, "we will definitely take back our lands under occupation, whatever this will cost," AFP reported. (The Azerbaijani-Turkish agreement on military cooperation signed on 5 May does not provide for one side to assist the other during hostilities.) Several Azerbaijani troops were wounded in border clashes with Armenian troops near the town of Kazakh in northwestern Azerbaijan on 6-7 May, according to Turan. Also on 7 May, the director of an Armenian organization for the protection of prisoners of war told journalists in Yerevan that all of the eighteen Armenian prisoners released by Azerbaijan in recent weeks were maltreated or tortured, ARMENPRESS reported.

05/14/1997 - More clashes on Armenian-Azerbaijani border - RFE/RL:

Armenia and Azerbaijan on 12 May, the third anniversary of the cease-fire agreement in Nagorno-Karabakh, accused each other again of cease-fire violations along the common border. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said Azerbaijani positions in Tauz Raion were shelled from Armenia, according to Interfax. Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliiev yesterday described the recent outbreak of hostilities as "accidental incidents" that should not be considered a breach of the 1994 cease-fire agreement. He said the fact that the

truce has largely held without the participation of international forces testifies to the "sincere desire" of the warring sides to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute peacefully.

05/15/1997 - Nouveaux échanges de tirs à la frontière entre l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan - AFP:

Des échanges de tirs sont survenus au cours des dernières 24 heures à la frontière entre Arménie et Azerbaïdjan sans faire de blessés, a affirmé jeudi le ministère arménien de la Défense cité par l'agence russe Interfax. Selon le ministère, les Azerbaïdjanais ont tiré avec des mortiers et des mitrailleuses sur les positions arméniennes dans la région de Taouch au nord-est de l'Arménie mercredi à 17h25 heure locale (13h25 gmt). Les forces arméniennes ont alors riposté et les tirs ont duré jusqu'à jeudi matin 12h25 (08h25 gmt), selon cette source. Ailleurs sur la frontière la situation était calme, a poursuivi ce responsable. Les accrochages à la frontière ont été fréquents au mois d'avril, faisant plusieurs morts, les deux parties s'accusant mutuellement d'avoir ouvert le feu en premier.

05/16/1997 - Armenian Premier raises possibility of annexing Nagorno-Karabakh - RFE/RL:

Robert Kocharyan, former president of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, told the Armenian parliament yesterday that "serious discussion" could be given to the possibility of the enclave's incorporation into Armenia if the government of the NKR made a formal request to that effect, according to Interfax. Foreign Minister Aleksandr Arzoumanian, however, told the parliament that the question of Nagorno-Karabakh's future status should be resolved by the OSCE Minsk Group. Representatives of the group met in Washington yesterday, RFE/RL reported.

05/20/1997 - Yeltsin on Nagorno-Karabakh - RFE/RL:

Yeltsin yesterday called on the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the acting president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh to make a concerted effort to achieve "real progress" toward ending the armed

conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and reaching a comprehensive settlement, Interfax reported. Yeltsin also proposed holding talks on the future status of the republic at the same time as discussions aimed at reaching a settlement. Azerbaijan refuses to discuss the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's future status until Armenia agrees to respect its territorial integrity. ARMENPRESS yesterday quoted an unnamed Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesman as rejecting Turkish media speculation that the ministry and Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, formerly president of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, have different opinions over the issue.

06/02/1997 - High-level talks on Karabakh - RFE/RL:

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and the Russian and French co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group made new proposals on a solution of the Karabakh conflict during separate meetings from 31 May-1 June with the leaders of Armenia, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan, Russian agencies reported. RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau quoted sources close to the Armenian Foreign Ministry as saying that the proposals leave Karabakh within Azerbaijan but with wide-ranging autonomy. Interfax quoted French diplomat Jacques Blot as stating that the suggestions are intended as a basis for further negotiations. Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliiev told ITAR-TASS on 1 June after meeting with the negotiators that conditions for reaching a settlement have never been as auspicious as they are now.

06/03/1997 - Azerbaijani confident of swift solution to Karabakh conflict - RFE/RL:

Interfax on 2 June quoted unnamed Azerbaijani government spokesmen as predicting that a solution to the Karabakh conflict will be reached this year on the basis of compromises between Baku and Yerevan. recently proposed by the three co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk group. Those compromises include the withdrawal of Karabakh Armenian forces from occupied Azerbaijani territory, international control of the Lachin corridor linking Karabakh and Armenia, and

international control of all armaments deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh that will be considered part of Armenia's permitted CFE quota. Following talks in Ankara on 2 June with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller said that Turkey supports the OSCE Minsk Group initiative but will also continue to play its own role in seeking to resolve the conflict, TRT Television Network reported.

06/03/1997 - Breakthrough needed in Karabakh talks, says Foreign Ministry - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

"A breakthrough at the negotiations on the settlement of the Karabakh conflict is absolutely essential," press secretary of the foreign minister of Armenia, Arsen Gasparian, said at a press conference with Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe delegates on Tuesday. Gasparian also said that rumors that a breakthrough in the negotiations had already been accomplished were completely untrue. The position of Armenia at the negotiations is known, he continued. Yerevan speaks up for direct contacts between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, without the participation of representatives from the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Armenia will not take part in those negotiations. Gasparian said he welcomes the formation of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. "We are interested in cooperating with NATO and integrating into other European structures," he said.

Proposals By The OSCE Minsk Group

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group proposed this week, during a shuttle diplomacy mission in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, that the Armenian side to the conflict withdraw not only from the so-called occupied territories (Azeri firing posts-Kelbajar, Aghdam, Fizouli, Dzhebrail, Zangelan, Gubatly and Lachin-neutralized by Nagorno-Karabakh self-defense forces) but also Shoushi. Baku, on the other hand, would be required to agree to allow Karabakh to maintain in military forces, with the mediators "guaranteeing strict international monitoring and an inventory of military equipment in Karabakh," the

Interfax news agency reported, quoting an Azeri diplomatic source. The OSCE Minsk Group also stipulated that the military hardware and equipment in Karabakh would be added to Armenia's quota as set by the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty. The Azeri diplomat also told Interfax that OSCE peacekeeping forces would be deployed following a withdrawal from the so-called "occupied territories." The forces would represent the US, Russia and other European nations. The number of forces from each country, and the general number of forces would be determined following the acceptance of the proposal by the sides to the conflict. The diplomat also added that the peacekeeping forces would be responsible for settling refugees into the "occupied territories" and to guarantee the safety of Karabakh residents. Following the settlement of refugees, the OSCE Minsk Group would work to stabilize the transport, energy and communications routes in the area. The peacekeeping forces would also be responsible to ensure the viability of the Lachin corridor, which is the only route connecting Armenia to Karabakh. In conjunction with this process, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh should also establish dialogue to determine the status of Karabakh, which in the Minsk Groups evaluation should be extended authority but not independence for Karabakh. International mediators would be able to intermittently participate in the Azeri-Karabakh talks, with a representative from Armenia taking part with observer status. Following an agreement on the Karabakh status, the Karabakh army would be downsized to resemble a military police force.

06/06/1997 - US involvement in Caucasus would weaken Russia's positions - Itar-Tass:

If an American peace force is moved to the Caucasus for putting an end to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, this would weaken Russia's positions in the region and inflict damage on its national interests, State Duma's expert on security Colonel Alexei Gordeichuk believes. He said it in an interview with Tass today, commenting on a report of The Journal Of Commerce And Commercial, newspaper of

U.S. business circles, published on Thursday. The report deals with the suggestion of the Clinton Administration that a U.S. peace force should be sent to the Caucasus for putting an end to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the opinion of Gordeichuk, the interference of foreign troops in the affairs of the Transcaucasian republics may upset traditional relations with Russia and lead to the heightening of tension in the region. Afterwards, after the inevitable withdrawal of the U.S. force, Russian peacekeeping troops will have to exert much effort, in order to establish peace there. The Russian expert stressed it was not accidental that the U.S. newspaper remarked: the suggestion about the movement of troops to the Caucasus was made several days before the taking of a decision on the laying of an oil pipeline from one of the main oil-bearing areas in the Caucasus to the West. "The struggle for Caspian oil is acquiring tough forms, and the appearance of troops of the NATO member states in the Transcaucasian Region was forecast by Western and Russian analysts. However, the activation of actions according to the principle 'Where there is oil - there are troops' will force Russia to take adequate measures," Gordeichuk said. The U.S. newspaper wrote as well that, according to the suggested plan, U.S. units together with peacekeeping units from Russia and some other European countries should monitor the settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the operation should be conducted under the aegis of OSCE. According to the newspaper, the plan was submitted for the consideration of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey during the tour of the region by U.S. First Under Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. "The Russian side was not informed of it, however, which looks rather perplexing," the Russian expert said.

06/15/1997 - L'OSCE propose un nouveau plan de paix pour le Haut-Karabakh - AFP:

Une délégation de l'Organisation pour la Sécurité et la Coopération en Europe (OSCE) a soumis à l'Arménie et à l'Azerbaïdjan un plan de paix pour le Haut-Karabakh, prévoyant un retrait des forces

arméniennes autour de ce territoire, a rapporté dimanche l'agence Interfax. Les diplomates délégués par l'OSCE ont quitté dimanche l'Azerbaïdjan, après avoir reçu la réponse azerbaïdjanaise à leur proposition. L'Arménie et le Haut-Karabakh avaient auparavant déjà répondu au plan de paix. Aucune de ces réponses n'a été rendue publique. Le plan prévoit un retrait des forces arméniennes des territoires azerbaïdjanais que celles-ci contrôlent autour du Haut-Karabakh, ainsi qu'un retrait de la localité de Choucha, qui fait partie du Haut-Karabakh, selon un diplomate azerbaïdjanais cité par Interfax. Les troupes arméniennes seraient remplacées par une force d'interposition de l'OSCE, composée de Russes, d'Américains et d'Européens, selon ce diplomate s'exprimant sous couvert de l'anonymat. La force d'interposition serait notamment déployée dans le couloir de Latchine, le seul point de passage entre le Haut-Karabakh et l'Arménie. Le Haut-Karabakh conserverait de son côté ses forces armées et ses armements, qui seraient recensés sous contrôle international. Ce plan de paix a été élaboré par la Russie, les Etats-Unis et la France, les trois coprésidents de la Conférence de Minsk, qui réunit sous l'égide de l'OSCE les pays chargés de dégager une solution au conflit arméno-azerbaïdjanais.

06/17/1997 - Azerbaijani official divulges details of new Karabkh peace plan - RFE/RL:

Azerbaijani State Adviser Vafa Guluzade has summarized the draft peace plan that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk Group submitted to the leaderships of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in late May. Noyan Tapan reported on 16 June, quoting Azerbaijani media. The plan gives Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous status within Azerbaijan and the right to its own constitution but stipulates the downsizing of the Karabakh armed forces. It calls for the withdrawal of Karabakh Armenian forces from five raions in Azerbaijan, the town of Shusha, and the Lachin corridor, which would be leased and policed by the OSCE. In addition, Nagorno-Karabakh would be granted the status of a free economic zone.

Interfax reported on 16 June that the Minsk Group co-chairmen may submit a report on Karabakh to the G-7 summit in Denver.

06/19/1997 - Nagorno-Karabakh: Presidential elections set for September - RFE/RL:

The separatist parliament in Nagorno-Karabakh has announced presidential elections in the ethnic Armenian enclave will be held on September 1. Itar-Tass reported today that the decision was reached last night in the enclave's self-declared capital, Stepanakert. The post has been vacant since March when Nagorno-Karabakh's self-styled President Robert Kocharyan was appointed Prime Minister of Armenia. The republic's self-proclaimed prime minister, Leonard Petrosyan, has held the post on an interim basis since then. Azerbaijan objected to the naming of Kocharyan as Armenian prime minister, saying it refuted Erevan's claim that it is neutral in the dispute over the ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan's territory.

06/20/1997 - Proposal backs Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan - Reuter:

The United States, France and Russia, as part of their new peace initiative in the oil-rich Caucasus, have proposed that Armenia accept the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh enclave as part of Azerbaijan, western diplomats say. The three mediators, operating as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, have vowed to keep their proposals secret. But authoritative diplomatic sources told Reuters that in return for Armenia recognizing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan would have to grant Nagorno-Karabakh an extraordinarily high degree of autonomy. President Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who are meeting at the G7 in Denver, were expected to issue a joint statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict later Friday, officials said. During the last three years there has been a truce but so far no permanent peace has taken hold. U.S. officials are encouraged, however, that with Washington, Paris and Moscow now joining forces to present a unified front and

vigorously press a settlement, the conflict could be resolved. Although the conflict is largely self-contained and hence not much of a threat to countries beyond the borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, there is substantial international interest in developing oil reserves in Azerbaijan and in building a multi-billion dollar pipeline to transport Caspian Sea oil to western markets. Experts say this is a key reason behind the new push for peace, which now claims the attention of senior officials, including U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. "This is the classic post-communist, post-Soviet ethnic conflict. It's got ramifications for peace, relations with Russia, Iran, oil, you name it," one western diplomat said. At least twice in recent weeks, U.S., French and Russian officials have visited the region to discuss their ideas with the affected parties and diplomatic sources say all three of the parties - including Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh - have taken the proposal seriously. Sources said the proposal was very detailed and they did not underestimate the difficulty of negotiations now underway. Some news reports suggested U.S., Russian and European peacekeepers might be introduced into the region as part of a settlement. U.S. and French officials refused comment. But Paul Goble, a former State Department official who is an expert on inter-ethnic conflict, told Reuters some kind of multi-national peacekeeping force will be needed to separate the hostile sides because "too much blood has been shed" and Azerbaijan will not accept a Russia-only troops. He said these forces need not be armed but could be observers to act as a "tripwire" against new violence. Goble and other analysts doubt the possibility of a settlement, however. "The Armenians see Karabakh in the way that the Israelis see Jerusalem - as a place which they can never give up," he said. Solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is as complicated as solving a multi-sided puzzle, he said. U.S. and other officials say the potential for stability and expanded economic development should be powerful reasons for the parties to make peace. But Goble and other experts said a solution must be more comprehensive, possibly requiring that Turkey acknowledge that a 1915 attack on Armenians

was genocide, for instance.

06/20/1997 - Chirac, Clinton et Eltsine appellent à la fin du conflit du Karabakh - AFP:

Les Etats-Unis, la France et la Russie ont appelé vendredi les protagonistes du conflit du Haut-Karabakh à établir « sans délai » une paix « stable et durable » sur la base d'une récente proposition présentée par ces trois pays. Dans un communiqué commun publié à Denver peu avant l'ouverture du Sommet des Huit, les présidents Jacques Chirac, Bill Clinton et Boris Eltsine expriment leur « profonde inquiétude » à propos de ce conflit estiment « insuffisant » le cessez-le-feu en place depuis 1994, tout en se disant « encouragés » par le fait qu'il est toujours observé. Les trois chefs d'Etat rappellent que leurs pays -- qui président conjointement la conférence de Minsk sur le Haut-Karabakh -- ont présenté récemment « une nouvelle proposition pour un règlement global prenant en compte les intérêts et préoccupations légitimes de toutes les parties ». L'agence russe Interfax avait fait part récemment de cette proposition, qui avait été transmises aux intéressés par l'OSCE, affirmant qu'il prévoyait un retrait des forces arméniennes stationnées autour de l'enclave et leur remplacement par une force composée de troupes américaines, européennes et russes. L'OSCE n'a pas confirmé officiellement la teneur du plan et MM. Chirac, Clinton et Eltsine n'ont fourni aucun détail. Ils estiment toutefois que la proposition « constitue une base appropriée pour aboutir à un accord » et appellent l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan à « adopter une attitude positive (...) et à négocier rapidement un accord ». « Nous pensons qu'il ne devrait y avoir aucun délai dans l'établissement d'une paix stable et durable dans la région », affirment-ils.

06/23/1997 - Une analyse de Gerard Libaridian - Document de conférence:

Gerard Libaridian, conseiller en chef du président arménien Lévon Ter Pétrossian, est intervenu au cours de la Conférence « La Transcaucasie aujourd'hui, perspectives pour l'intégration régionale », le 23 juin dernier à Erevan. Selon lui, l'Azerbaïdjan a

adopté une « logique » particulière pour ses négociations, celle du pétrole : « L'Azerbaïdjan, dit-il, négocie le statut du Haut-Karabakh avec "les amis du pétrole", non avec la partie arménienne ni avec le peuple du Haut-Karabakh ». « Ce que la communauté internationale, poursuit-il, et beaucoup de nos amis voient comme la base du bonheur et de la prospérité futurs, le pétrole, devient le principal obstacle aujourd'hui à une solution négociée. Pour les Arméniens du Karabakh et pour le citoyen arménien, le pétrole n'apparaît certainement pas comme l'élément qui apportera la paix et la prospérité. Le pétrole, ou plutôt le rôle du pétrole dans la stratégie azerbaïdjanaise, est le principal obstacle à la paix et à la prospérité, ainsi qu'à la coopération régionale ».

06/25/1997 - Azerbaijan calls Denver statement timely and important - RIA Novosti (Asbarez-on-line):

The statement made in Denver by the presidents of Russia, the United States and France on the need to resolve the Karabakh conflict as soon as possible is "very important and timely," the Azeri presidential adviser Vafa Gulizade told a RIA Novosti correspondent Wednesday. He stressed that the leaders of the three leading states "have shown readiness to cooperate in order to achieve the desired objective." According to Gulizade, the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk conference on Nagorno-Karabakh-the representatives of Russia, US and France-are scheduled to pay a regular visit to Azerbaijan and Armenia in the near future in order "to promote the negotiation process between the sides." Gulizade also stated that the Minsk Group negotiators were scheduled to possible present "new approaches to the solution of the problem in the light of the Denver statement."

06/25/1997 - Erevan favorable à l'initiative de Chirac, Clinton et Eltsine - AFP:

L'Arménie a exprimé mercredi son soutien à une proposition de règlement lancée récemment par les Etats-Unis, la France et la Russie pour régler le conflit du Haut-Karabakh. « L'Arménie est d'accord avec la déclaration faite à Denver, » a déclaré Lévon Zourabian, porte-

parole de la présidence arménienne. « Nous pensons également que l'on peut arriver à un règlement sur la base de discussions avec toutes les parties impliquées dans le conflit », a souligné le porte-parole. M. Zourabian a affirmé que l'Arménie « continuera à participer de façon constructive » dans les négociations de paix, qui sont dans l'impasse depuis le cessez-le-feu de 1994, les séparatistes revendiquant une véritable indépendance -- ce qu'Erevan soutient -- alors que Bakou n'est prêt à concéder qu'une autonomie culturelle.

RUSSIE / RUSSIA

Conflit tchétchène / Chechen conflict

04/01/1997 - Rybkin holds talks with Chechens - RFE/RL:

Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin met with Chechen First Deputy Premier Movladi Udugov in the Ingush capital of Nazran on 29 March in an attempt to dispel disagreement over the nature of Chechnya's future economic and political relations with Moscow, AFP and ITAR-TASS reported. During the last round of talks in Grozny in early March, the two sides reached agreement on most provisions of the two documents. But Moscow later submitted to the Chechen leadership substantially amended drafts, which the Chechens termed unacceptable. Chechen Security Council chief Akhmed Zakayev told ITAR-TASS on 29 March that the Chechen side has prepared its own alternative draft agreements. Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov said last week he favors signing a formal peace agreement with Yeltsin, to be followed by a bilateral inter-governmental agreement on economic relations.

04/01/1997 - A new OSCE representative in Chechnya - RFE/RL:

An OSCE spokesman announced yesterday that Tim Guldemann, head of its mission in Chechnya since January 1996, has resigned. Danish diplomat Rudolf Thorning-Petersen has been appointed to replace him. The Russian Foreign Ministry said today there is no need for further OSCE mediation in

Chechnya because the Russian and Chechen leaderships are now engaged in direct talks. Meanwhile in Moscow, Russian State Duma speaker Gennadii Seleznev and Duma Security Committee chairman Viktor Ilyukhin have criticized Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's appointment of field commander Shamil Basaev as first deputy premier. Seleznev said Basaev was not a capable administrator, while Ilyukhin called him "odious."

04/01/1997 - Basaev nominated first deputy premier - RFE/RL:

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov has proposed radical field commander Shamil Basaev as first deputy prime minister with special responsibility for industry, Russian news agencies reported on 1 April. Basaev was Maskhadov's closest challenger in the January presidential elections. Meanwhile, the Chechen Interior Ministry has demanded the extradition from Moscow of some 70 people wanted for embezzlement of public funds, according to Interfax. Among them are ministers who served under former President Doku Zavgaev. Also on 1 April, a joint Russian-Chechen commission was created in Grozny to verify claims that 11 Russian servicemen are being held prisoner in the Chechen town of Argun.

04/09/1997 - Chechen president meets with Georgian delegation - RFE/RL:

Aslan Maskhadov met with a Georgian parliamentary delegation yesterday to discuss bilateral relations and the ongoing conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Nezavisimaya gazeta reported. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze has been pursuing closer ties with Chechnya for several months. Meanwhile, Maskhadov has named Ruslan Kutaev, leader of the Chechen National Independence Party, as his special aide with responsibility for state policy, strategic defense, and diplomacy, ITAR-TASS reported yesterday. Maskhadov is scheduled to leave Grozny today on the first of seven Saudi-financed flights transporting 650 Chechen pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

04/10/1997 - Rybkin meets with Chechen leaders in Grozny - RFE/RL:

Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin and his deputy, Boris Berezovskii, met with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and First Deputy Prime Minister Movladi Udugov in Grozny yesterday. No details of the talks were released, but Nezavisimaya gazeta suggested today that they focused on draft agreements on bilateral relations. Meanwhile, Maskhadov has denied that he plans to attend a conference in Pitsunda next month of presidents of unrecognized states, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He denounced the report as an attempt to undermine Chechen-Georgian relations.

04/14/1997 - Renegade Chechen field commander reported critically injured - RFE/RL:

Salman Raduev was badly injured when a bomb exploded under his car on 9 April, his military consultant Sultan Miyev told journalists in Grozny two days later. But according to Interfax, the Chechen Interior Ministry denied any knowledge of the attack, while spokesmen for Grozny's hospitals told ITAR-TASS he had not been admitted. AFP, meanwhile, reported that Raduev was transported to an unknown destination outside Chechnya, where he underwent surgery on 12 April. Miyev blamed Russia for the assassination attempt and threatened reprisal attacks against Russian cities. Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Movladi Udugov and a spokesman for the Russian Federal Security Service both expressed concern that such threats could jeopardize the ongoing Russian-Chechen peace talks.

04/25/1997 - Russian air force on Chechen threat - RFE/RL:

A spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry told Interfax yesterday that military flights over Chechnya will continue, despite Chechen Vice President Vakha Arsanov's 23 April statement that aircraft violating Chechen airspace will be shot down. State Duma speaker Gennadii Seleznev termed the threat "absolute rubbish." Nezavisimaya gazeta today quotes an air force spokesman as claiming that the Chechen authorities do not

wish to be hindered in the large-scale air transport of drugs and arms from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Cyprus. Meanwhile, a Foreign Ministry spokesman warned that Russia will take "appropriate measures" against any countries that establish ties with Chechnya beyond "economic, humanitarian, and cultural contacts," Interfax reported yesterday.

04/28/1997 - Confusion over Chechen link to Armavir bombing - RFE/RL:

ITAR-TASS on 25 April quoted Chechen maverick field commander Salman Raduev as claiming responsibility for the bomb explosion in Armavir two days earlier, which killed three people, and threatening further attacks. Chechen Vice President Vakha Arsanov dismissed his claim, arguing that Raduev "is a medical problem and his statement should not be taken seriously." The following day, Chechen First Deputy Premier Movladi Udugov described the report as a "provocation" and suggested it was a hoax. Udugov said that no Chechen would deliberately disrupt the ongoing talks on a political settlement between Russia and Chechnya, Interfax reported.

04/28/1997 - Maskhadov assesses ties with Middle East - RFE/RL:

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov says he has reached "agreement" with Arab leaders on cooperation, Russian agencies reported. He was speaking to Chechen TV on 26 April, one day after returning from his pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. But his spokesman, Kazbek Khadzhev, denied that Maskhadov raised the issue of "financial, economic, or any other assistance" in his talks with Muslim leaders. Also on 26 April, the Chechen Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that the Russian Foreign Ministry's warning of retaliatory measures against countries that establish diplomatic relations with Chechnya was "ill-timed and tactless." In Moscow, Maskhadov's representative Ruslan Kutayev met with Vladimir Zorin, the chairman of the State Duma Committee for Nationalities, to discuss the hiatus in the ongoing Russian-Chechen peace talks.

04/29/1997 - Maskhadov wants another contract on Caspian oil transportation - RFE/RL:

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov yesterday called for a contract to be drawn up between Chechnya, Russia, and an international consortium exploiting three Azerbaijani Caspian oil fields to regulate the export of that oil via Chechnya to Novorossiisk, Interfax reported. But under its obligations to the Azerbaijani government, the consortium is required only to transport the oil as far as the Azerbaijani-Russian frontier. The oil is then transported through Russia under a separate agreement between the Azerbaijani government and the Russian pipeline company Transneft. Segodnya on 25 April reported that the Chechen leadership will agree to the transportation of Azerbaijan's Caspian oil to Novorossiisk only if Russia approves the construction of a second pipeline to transport Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil through Grozny to Georgia where it will link up with the Baku-Supsa pipeline.

05/02/1997 - Rybkin confers with Chechen leadership - RFE/RL:

Russian Security Council secretary Ivan Rybkin flew to Grozny on 30 April for six hours of talks with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and first deputy prime minister Movladi Udugov, Russian and Western agencies reported. Rybkin and Udugov subsequently issued a joint statement repeating their commitment to the peace process. They also denounced the recent bombings in Armavir and Pyatigorsk in which five people were killed, Interfax reported. Maskhadov told ITAR-TASS that he is ready to meet "any time, anywhere" with Yeltsin, as only "direct and frank talks" can ease the tensions between Moscow and Grozny. Maskhadov and Yeltsin will meet next week to sign a formal peace agreement, Reuters reported today.

05/05/1997 - Raduev admits to North Caucasus bombings - RFE/RL:

Chechen maverick field commander Salman Raduev says he ordered last month's bomb explosions in Armavir and Pyatigorsk, which killed a total of five people, Western agencies reported yesterday. Chechen Interior Minister Kazbek

Makhashev the same day distanced himself from Chechen officials' claims that Russian police falsely identified two Chechen women arrested in connection with the Pyatigorsk bomb. Raduev also threatened to use chemical weapons in retaliation if the two women were harmed. The Russian Security Council discussed Chechnya yesterday but failed to set a date for a meeting between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his Chechen counterpart, Aslan Maskhadov. Spokesman Kazbek Khadzhiyev told Interfax that Maskhadov plans a radical reorganization of the Chechen Interior Ministry to combat widespread crime more effectively.

05/12/1997 - Yeltsin, Maskhadov sign peace agreement - RFE/RL:

President Boris Yeltsin and his Chechen counterpart, Aslan Maskhadov, today signed a treaty "on peace and the principles of Russian-Chechen relations," RFE/RL's Moscow bureau reported. On arriving in Moscow this morning, Maskhadov said the signing of the treaty would deprive unspecified hard-liners in Russia of "any basis to create ill-feelings between Moscow and Grozny." He added that the signing means "Russia, the North Caucasus, and the whole Muslim world" will enter a new political era, according to AFP. Details of the treaty are not yet known. Late last week, substantive differences were reported between Moscow and Grozny. Maskhadov is also scheduled to meet with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin later today to sign bilateral socio-economic agreements, including on customs and banking, ITAR-TASS reported.

05/12/1997 - Chernomyrdin sets conditions for aid to Chechnya - RFE/RL:

In an interview with ITAR-TASS on 10 May, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin said that Moscow continues to view Chechnya as a constituent part of the Russian Federation and that no funds will be made available for reconstruction before the signing of a formal peace treaty between Moscow and Grozny. He added that Russia will not assume the entire cost of reconstruction since Chechnya has its own resources in the form of

crude oil as well as the facilities to refine and process the oil.

05/12/1997 - Raduev pledges no further attacks against Russia - RFE/RL:

Meeting in Grozny on 10 May with Chechen First Deputy Premiers Shamil Basaev and Movladi Udugov, maverick field commander Salman Raduev pledged to desist from further terrorist threats against Russia or other acts that could jeopardize the peace process, ITAR-TASS reported. Only hours earlier, however, Raduev had told fellow members of the Dzhokhar's Path movement at a rally in the Chechen capital that he vows "to continue the fight until full political independence for Chechnya" is achieved. He also accused the Chechen leadership of planning a peace agreement "behind the people's back."

05/13/1997 - Reactions to Russian-Chechen treaty - RFE/RL:

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov says the treaty on Russian-Chechen relations that he and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed yesterday in Moscow is a "historic step." Vice President Vakha Arsanov said the accord "puts an end to the state of war" and makes Chechnya a subject of international law, Interfax reported. The treaty affirms both sides' aspirations to "firm and equal relations" based on the principles of international law. It also stresses their rejection of the use of force. No mention is made of Chechnya's status. Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin said the treaty will "introduce an element of sincerity" into relations between Moscow and Grozny. Ingush President Ruslan Aushev said it will provide impetus for positive changes in Chechnya. Bashkortostan's President Murtaza Rakhimov termed the document a "breakthrough" and a "basis for confidence."

05/13/1997 - More Russian-Chechen agreements - RFE/RL:

Maskhadov and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin yesterday signed an agreement on economic cooperation that provides for coordination between Russian and Chechen ministries on

reconstruction in the republic, pensions, and compensation to those who suffered during the fighting, Russian agencies reported. Sergei Dubinin, the director of Russia's Central Bank, and his Chechen counterpart signed an agreement on coordinating banking operations.

05/14/1997 - Moscow's calculations behind Chechen accord - RFE/RL:

Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin and his deputy, Boris Berezovskii, told journalists yesterday that the Russian government signed the treaty with the Chechen Republic for three reasons. First, the accord demonstrated that the Russian Federation has dropped the "imperial" tradition in dealing with its periphery. Second, it could give Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov enough political room to stand up to his own militants and possibly to disarm some of them. Third, the accord may allow Russia to transport oil across Chechnya and thus reap enormous profits. Three draft agreements on oil and its transit are now in preparation, Russian news agencies reported. Meanwhile, maverick field commander Salman Raduev pledged yesterday not to lay down his arms until Moscow recognized Chechen independence. Maskhadov, on his return to Chechnya, celebrated the accord and called on the Chechen diaspora to help rebuild their country.

05/15/1997 - Chechen government approves peace treaty - RFE/RL:

The Chechen government yesterday approved the treaty signed on 12 May by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov on the principles of relations between Moscow and Grozny, NTV reported. Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin chaired a session of the Russian Federal Commission on Chechnya to discuss implementation of the economic agreements signed the same day as the treaty. Also yesterday, the State Duma adopted a resolution calling on Yeltsin to instruct Rybkin to explain the treaty to the Duma. It also asked its Security Committee to assess the treaty. The Duma wants to determine whether the

treaty was concluded with a subject of the federation, whether the Chechen Republic is a constituent part of Russia, whether Russia was at war with Chechnya, and whether the status of Chechnya's internal borders with the rest of the Russian Federation remains unchanged, ITAR-TASS reported.

05/23-26/1997 - Chechen President offers reward for release of abducted journalists - RFE/RL:

On 24 May, Aslan Maskhadov again offered a \$100,000 reward for information leading to the safe release of journalists from the Russian media who have been abducted in Chechnya in recent months, Interfax reported. Speaking on local television the same day, Chechen Interior Minister Kazbek Makhachev called on the abductors to release the journalists immediately in order to avoid incurring the death penalty. Makhachev said the Chechen leadership does not have "authentic information" about the journalists' whereabouts, but security service chief Luchi Khulygov told ITAR-TASS on 25 May that he has "trustworthy information" for optimistic forecasts. Yeltsin on 22 May sent a telegram to his Chechen counterpart, Aslan Maskhadov, asking him to facilitate cooperation between Russian and Chechen law enforcement agencies to ensure the release of seven journalists abducted in Chechnya over the past few months.

05/26/1997 - Russia, Chechnya sign agreement on oil transit - RFE/RL:

The Russian Fuel and Oil Ministry and the Chechen national oil company Yunko signed a cooperation agreement on 23 May whereby Grozny undertakes to "service and safeguard the oil and gasoline pipelines crossing Chechnya," Russian agencies reported. A separate agreement will be signed on reconstruction of the Baku-Grozny-Tikhoretsk pipeline, which is estimated to cost \$1.2 million. Reconstruction is expected to be completed by October, which may delay yet again the export via this pipeline of the first "early" oil from Azerbaijan's Chirag field. Those exports are scheduled to begin on 28 August.

06/02/1997 - Rybkin, North Caucasus leaders sign friendship, cooperation declaration - RFE/RL:

Meeting in the North Caucasus spa of Kislovodsk on 31 May, Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin, Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Movladi Udugov, and the heads of eight other North Caucasus republics and regions signed a joint declaration on peace, friendship, and cooperation, Russian and Western agencies reported. The declaration is intended as a follow-up to the Russian-Chechen peace treaty signed in Moscow on 12 May. In a message to participants at the meeting, Yeltsin stressed that it is imperative to remove all obstacles to the peaceful coexistence of all peoples of the North Caucasus. Udugov told Interfax on 1 June that he has proposed the creation of an organization like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the Caucasus to guarantee stability in the region.

06/03/1997 - Low turnout, irregularities in Chechen elections - RFE/RL:

The 31 May mayoral elections and by-elections in 20 constituencies where no candidate received a majority in the 27 January parliamentary ballot were marred by irregularities, Russian and Western agencies reported. The Grozny mayoral election, which was contested by 12 candidates, was pronounced invalid by Central Electoral Commission chairman Mumadi Saidayev on 2 June because less than 30% of the electorate cast votes, according to an RFE/RL correspondent in Grozny. Also on 2 June, an Austrian businessman and five Chechens abducted in recent months were freed by Chechen police, Western agencies reported. Meanwhile, a spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross has refuted press reports that the organization is ready to resume operations in Chechnya, according to ITAR-TASS.

06/09/1997 - Chechen roundup - RFE/RL:

Following talks with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov in Nazran on 6 June, Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Boris

Berezovskii told Interfax that the normalization of the situation in Chechnya would be a protracted process and that the top priority is currently restoring the region's oil complex. Berezovskii endorsed the proposed creation of organization for the Caucasus modeled on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Also on 6 June, Russian Interior Minister Anatolii Kulikov accused his Chechen counterpart, Kazbek Makhashev, of seeking to avoid cooperation in combating crime, including abductions. Two days later, ITAR-TASS cited Maskhadov's press spokesman Kazbek Khadzhiyev as saying that an Islamic banking and court system will be established in Chechnya.

06/11/1997 - Chechen President issues ultimatum on hostages - RFE/RL:

Aslan Maskhadov said on Chechen TV on 10 June that he has met with the Chechen field commander responsible for the abduction last month of three journalists for NTV and has demanded that he release them within three days, according to Interfax. The previous day, Maskhadov had accused unnamed field commanders of resorting to kidnappings, provoking religious tension, and "setting the parliament against the president" in the hope of profiting from "uncertainty and chaos." "Segodnya" in its 10 June issue suggested that the unexplained delay in signing the Russian-Chechen agreement on oil transit, which was recently reported to be imminent, is because the Chechens are proposing a "hostages-for-oil" deal. Also on 10 June, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Chubais told journalists that under the 1997 federal budget Chechnya will receive more than \$90 million toward reconstruction, AFP reported.

06/12/1997 - Agapov slams Russia's North Caucasus policy - RFE/RL:

In an interview with Interfax on 11 June, newly appointed Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Boris Agapov said the federal authorities' failure to expedite the repatriation of some 40,000 ethnic Ingush expelled from North Ossetia's Prigorodnyi Raion in 1992 was "offensive" to both the Ingush

and Ossetian peoples. Agapov warned that the conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia is "on hold rather than resolved and an explosion may occur sooner or later." Agapov said that the creation of an "Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Caucasus," proposed by Chechen representatives at a meeting of North Caucasus leaders in Kislovodsk on 31 May, similarly demonstrates Russia's failure to play an adequate role in the North Caucasus.

06/13/1997 - Russia, Chechnya agree on transit of Azerbaijani oil - RFE/RL:

Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, meeting in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, have signed a "memorandum" that includes an agreement on the transit of Azerbaijani oil, ITAR-TASS reported on 13 June. The agreement envisages that the "early oil" from Azerbaijan's offshore fields will be exported to the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk via a pipeline transiting Russia. The 153-km stretch of the pipeline that transits Chechnya was badly damaged during the war. Earlier, First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, who is also minister for fuel and energy, said Moscow is confident it will raise the \$2 million that Chechnya needs to finish repairing the pipeline, Reuters reported. Chechen Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Zakayev said that, despite Moscow's objections, Grozny will also sign a separate oil deal with the international consortium developing Azerbaijan's oil fields. Officials said the talks focused on a "very wide range" of economic and political issues. Maskhadov noted that the two sides reached agreement on a large number of questions and that their major task is to find practical ways of implementing earlier agreements, AFP reported. Boris Berezovskii, deputy secretary of the Russian Security Council, said a "mutual understanding" was reached during the talks. Chernomyrdin reportedly asked the Chechen leaders about the kidnapping of Russian journalists in the breakaway region, but no details were reported about the Chechen reaction. Meanwhile, ITAR-TASS quoted Chernomyrdin

as saying a customs agreement may be signed on 13 June.

06/16/1997 - Update on Russian-Chechen agreements - RFE/RL:

The 13 June Russian-Chechen memorandum stipulates the conclusion of an agreement between the Russian Fuel and Energy Ministry, the Chechen State Oil Company Yunko, and the Azerbaijan International Operating Committee on the transit from Baku to Novorossiisk via Grozny of oil from three offshore Caspian deposits, Russian and Western agencies reported. The memorandum was signed by Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov in Sochi. Yunko President Khozh-Akhmed Yarikhanov warned on 15 June that Chechnya will continue to insist on being an equal partner in oil transportation, according to Interfax. Following talks the previous day with Chernomyrdin and head of the Russian Customs Service Anatolii Kruglov, Maskhadov signed an agreement on customs cooperation, ITAR-TASS reported. That accord confers international status on Grozny's Sheikh Mansour airport.

06/16/1997 - Berezovskii assesses Chechen situation - RFE/RL:

Speaking at a press conference at Interfax headquarters on 14 June, Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Boris Berezovskii reiterated that Chechnya is an "unalienable part of the Russian Federation" and that a final settlement of the conflict could take more than "one generation." Berezovskii excluded a resumption of hostilities while Yeltsin remains president but said this could not be ruled out if "brainless people" come to power in Russia. He expressed support for Chechen President Maskhadov, implicitly corroborating speculation in the Russian press that Maskhadov is under pressure from rival political groups in Chechnya. Berezovskii also criticized Russian Interior Minister Anatolii Kulikov for blocking implementation of an agreed exchange of Russian and Chechen prisoners, according to Reuters.

06/17/1997 - Maskhadov orders two Chechen regiments to disband - RFE/RL:

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov signed decrees on 15 June ordering that the Borz [Wolf] regiment and the General Dudaev army, headed by maverick field commander Salman Raduev, be disbanded, Russian media reported. Members of those formations will be offered the opportunity to serve in the Chechen National Guard. A spokesman for Raduev told NTV, however, that the army's 4,500 men would execute Raduev if he tried to comply with Maskhadov's decree. On 16 June, Maskhadov mobilized 3,000 police in operation called "Shield of Law and Order," which succeeded in securing the release of six hostages but not that of the five kidnapped Russian journalists.

06/18/1997 - Chechen President criticizes Kulikov - RFE/RL:

Speaking at a press conference in Grozny on 17 June, Aslan Maskhadov accused Russian Interior Minister Anatolii Kulikov of sabotaging the Russian-Chechen peace process, Reuters and Interfax reported. Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Boris Berezovskii had charged three days earlier that Kulikov was hindering the exchange of Chechen prisoners of war for Russian Interior Ministry troops. In an interview published in "Komsomolskaya pravda" on 17 June, Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin similarly said Kulikov is incapable of establishing productive contacts with the Chechen Interior Ministry. Kulikov denied those accusations, telling Radio Mayak that 70 Chechens were recently exchanged for 200 Russian prisoners. Kulikov also said that he had met twice in recent months with his Chechen counterpart, Kazbek Makhachev, and that the Chechen side had rejected as premature his offer to send Russian police to serve in Chechnya, according to "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 18 June.

06/18/1997 - Chechen fugitives protest imminent deportation - RFE/RL:

Chechens who fled to Kabardino-Balkaria during the 1994-1996 war are faced with imminent deportation, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 17 June. Their representatives have sent a

telegram to the federal Coordinating Council for Aid to Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons protesting a ruling by the government of Kabardino-Balkaria to send them back to Chechnya by 1 July. Some 4,800 Chechen fugitives are officially registered in Kabardino-Balkaria, but their actual number is closer to 15,000, according to the Federal Migration Service.

06/20/1997 - Kulikov supports proposed media boycott of Chechnya - RFE/RL:

Interior Minister Anatolii Kulikov has said he supports the proposal by some journalists to impose a media boycott of Chechnya in protest at the latest series of kidnappings of some of their colleagues in the breakaway republic, Interfax reported on 19 June. Kulikov termed the kidnappings a "dangerous and infectious disease typical of that region," adding that he was against paying ransoms to the kidnappers. Kulikov also said Russian construction workers and some 400 servicemen are still being kept prisoner in Chechnya and that their release was a "priority" for Moscow. According to Kulikov, Chechnya is full of gangs outside the control of President Aslan Maskhadov, who, he said, is unwilling to accept help from the Russian law-enforcement bodies. Kulikov expressed readiness to help Chechen authorities in combating crime.

AZERBAIDJAN / AZERBAIJAN

Politique étrangère et commerce extérieur / Foreign policy and trade

04/07/1997 - Azerbaijani president postpones visit to Turkey - RFE/RL:

Heidar Aliyev has postponed a three-day state visit to Turkey, scheduled to begin today, in order not to be in Ankara tomorrow when the funeral of Alparslan Turkes takes place, AFP reported. Turkes, who died on 5 April, was the leader of the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party, also known as the Grey Wolves. Iskender Hamidov, leader of the Azerbaijani Grey Wolves, was arrested in March 1995 on suspicion of involvement in an alleged coup attempt against Aliyev. The Azerbaijani president later claimed

that Turkish security service officers were also implicated in the incident.

04/10/1997 - Aliyev calls on Georgia to condemn Russian arms supplies to Armenia - RFE/RL:

Meeting in Baku yesterday with visiting Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili, Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliyev expressed the hope that the Georgian leadership will condemn Russian arms shipments to Armenia, Interfax reported. Aliyev intimated that Armenia could use this hardware against Georgia. Meanwhile in Yerevan, Armenian Defense Minister Vazgen Sarkisyan said on national TV that the reports on the arms shipments are aimed at weakening the Armenian army and depriving the country of aid. Last month, Sarkisyan had implicitly confirmed the reports.

04/14/1997 - Azerbaijan violated CFE treaty - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

"Neither Armenia, nor Georgia have, on the whole, exceeded the arms quota set for them under the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, while it is only Azerbaijan which keeps on openly defying the Treaty," Vitaly Danilov, a representative of the International Human Rights Congress operating within the framework of the OSCE, said at a recent news conference in Yerevan. Danilov announced the text of the IHRC statement issued Thursday, following which during the period from 1992 to 1996 Azerbaijan purchased a great deal of offensive weapons thus exceeding its CFE quota. According to the statement, the turmoil over Russian arms supplies to Armenia stirred up by Azerbaijan and its persistent attempts to meddle publicly in the internal affairs of Russia and Armenia have not only a far-going target to reinforce Azerbaijan's military superiority over its neighbors and act as the only international inspector and gendarme in the region, but are also aimed at impeding the negotiating process on the Karabakh conflict held in Moscow within the framework of the OSCE Minsk group. According to data submitted by the Azeri leadership to OSCE, in July and August 1992 the Russian Federation gave Azerbaijan 285

tanks, 842 armored carriers, 346 artillery systems, 53 military planes and 8 helicopters. In May 1993 Russia donated 105 more armored carriers and 42 artillery systems to Azerbaijan. In the period of 1993-1995 Azerbaijan received 150 tanks and 10 military planes from different countries. In 1996 Azerbaijan purchased sophisticated ground-based missiles. Moreover, in 1992-1993 Azerbaijan received over one thousand carriages of artillery and tank shells, about 500 carriages of cartridges, a great deal of aircraft bombs and missiles. Azerbaijan also purchased a lot of powerful aircraft bombs and "air-ground" missiles. According to the statement, because of the number of weapons, Azerbaijan has been the region's best armed state since 1992, exceeding by far the CFE Treaty quota. If a comparison were made between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as of late 1996 (taking into account the losses in Nagorno-Karabakh and border incidents) the situation will be as follows: Azerbaijan has 285 tanks, while Armenia has 129; Azerbaijan has 785 armored carriers, Armenia 346; Azerbaijan has 354 artillery systems, while Armenia only 25; Azerbaijan has 53 military planes, and Armenia 6. It is also said in the statement that most aircrafts given to Azerbaijan are fighters. It is noted that among artillery systems given to Azerbaijan are "Grad" rocket installations with 245 jet shells. The document calls on OSCE member-states to take certain diplomatic steps to force Azerbaijan to abide by European treaties on conventional arms, and to conduct a civilized policy in the region based not on duress and blackmail, but on a peaceful negotiating process.

04/14/1997 - Central Asia: Turkic-speaking states agree on Eurasian ministry - RFE/RL:

A meeting of representatives of Turkic-speaking states and communities has concluded in Istanbul. Participants decided to set up a Ministry for Eurasian Affairs to function within the framework of Turkey's government. Speakers also suggested instituting a standing educational council and an Academy of the Turkic-Speaking World, emphasizing the importance of developing all-round contacts among "fraternal states" in culture, education, economics and trade.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, as well representatives from the Russian Federation republics of Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Tatarstan, and Chuvashiya. Addressing today's closing session, Turkey's Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller is quoted by Itar-Tass news agency as urging a "Railway Silk Road" which she said will run from Asia to Europe, as one of the most important projects for Turkic-speaking countries.

04/17/1997 - Baku tries to involve Georgia in anti-Armenian campaign - Azg/Fact (Asbarez-on-line):

A delegation of the Azeri Milli Mejlis (parliament) arrived in Tbilisi Tuesday bringing with it a declaration of the Mejlis condemning the alleged illegal supply of Russian weaponry to Armenia. Head of the delegation Zakhid Ghoralov, declared that Iran and Georgia were the main routes for the supply of Russian weaponry to Armenia. He stressed that former Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachov and the command of Russian forces in Transcaucasia were directly involved in this action. Ghoralov said that Armenia now has 1,000 R-17 missile systems with a range of 300 km. He said that using Georgia's territory for the delivery of Russian weaponry to Armenia won't affect Azeri relations with Georgia since Azerbaijan is sure that Georgian leaders were not aware of the actions of the Russian soldiers.

04/23/1997 - Iranian foreign minister calls for closer regional cooperation - RFE/RL:

Ali Akbar Velayati told journalists in Baku yesterday that the Transcaucasian countries should join forces to prevent the increase of U.S. influence in the region, RFE/RL's Baku bureau reported. He also said that the liberation of Azerbaijani territories currently occupied by Karabakh Armenian forces should take place without the intervention of external powers. Velayati refused to answer questions about Iranian economic cooperation with Armenia or about his government's failure to honor an agreement to open an Azerbaijani

consulate in Tabriz. In response to Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliyev's request to "exert influence" on Armenia to expedite a settlement to the Karabakh conflict, Velayati said Iran will do what it can to promote "normal relations" between Azerbaijan and Armenia, according to ITAR-TASS.

04/24/1997 - Kyrgyz president in Baku - RFE/RL:

Askar Akayev and his Azerbaijani counterpart, Heidar Aliyev, signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation in Baku yesterday, ITAR-TASS and Turan reported. Akayev reiterated his interest in using the Transcaucasian transport corridor, for which his country has been granted a 50% reduction in tariffs, and noted that Kyrgyzstan wants to purchase crude oil and petrochemicals from Azerbaijan. A dozen or so intergovernmental agreements on economic, financial, and legal cooperation were also signed.

04/28/1997 - Ter-Petrosyan, Aliyev meet in Istanbul - Reuter/Itar-Tass (Asbarez-on-line):

The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan held talks at a conference of Black Sea countries in Istanbul Monday following some of the worst fighting between the Caucasus neighbors in nearly three years. Levon Ter-Petrosyan told journalists afterward that a fragile cease-fire between the two countries remained in place despite the recent fighting. "There is a cease-fire," he said. Ter-Petrosyan and Azeri President Gaidar Aliyev arrived in Turkey earlier in the day to attend a meeting of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation forum. The pair declined to comment on their talks. The two countries traded accusations of cross-border attacks last week after two weeks of sporadic and violent clashes. The two leaders did not make any statements for the press. But sources close to the Armenian delegation said they had failed to reach progress during their 45-minute tête-à-tête talk. The meeting was organized by Turkish President Suleyman Demirel who offered to act as a mediator. "We will try to reach peace in the Caucasus, which should boost cooperation among all countries of the Black Sea region," he said.

04/28/1997 - Iran, Azerbaijan schism deepens - RFE/RL:

Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati's one-day visit to Baku this week served to highlight increasing strains in bi-lateral relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. These tensions have multiple causes. Each country suspects the other of trying to destabilize its internal political situation. In addition, Iran and Azerbaijan have conflicting strategic and economic priorities. Iran looks to Russia as an ally, whereas Azerbaijan seeks to broaden its cooperation with the United States, Europe and Turkey. A major cause of tension is the existence in northwestern Iran of a large ethnic Azeri minority estimated at between 12 and 20 million. This is equivalent to up to one third of Iran's total population. By contrast, there are only six to seven million ethnic Azeris in Azerbaijan. There are at least two ethnic Azeri organizations in Iran. One, the Azerbaijan Democratic Party, which is lobbying for greater autonomy, whereas the more radical Front for the National Independence of South Azerbaijan wants an independent Azeri state in what is now northwest Iran, as a prelude to union with Baku. Although Azerbaijan's leadership has denied any territorial claims on Iran, it has granted political asylum to Iranian Azeris who advocate Baku's annexation of Iranian territory. The Baku government for its part suspects Iran of trying to export its brand of Islamic fundamentalism to Azerbaijan. Four members of the so-called Islamic Party of Azerbaijan were recently sentenced by a Baku court to prison terms of between 10 and 11 years on charges of treason. They were said to have received funding from Iranian intelligence for religious activities. Doubts about the loyalty of its ethnic Azeri population may be the reason why Teheran has not yet implemented an agreement signed with Baku on the opening of consulates. Iran has opened a consulate in Nakhichevan, with which it shares a border, but has blocked the opening of an Azeri consulate in Tabriz. Speaking to journalists in Baku Tuesday, Velayati refused to answer questions either about the Tabriz consulate, or about Iran's flourishing economic cooperation with Armenia. Since the collapse of the USSR, Iran has become

Armenia's second-most-important trading partner after Russia. Iran-Armenia bi-lateral trade in 1995 was worth \$126 million. Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Hasan Hasanov characterized Armenia as "a negative influence" on Azerbaijan-Iran relations. Both Hasanov and Azerbaijan's President Gaidar Aliyev asked Velayati to use his influence with Armenia's leadership in order to try to resolve the deadlock in talks on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Velayati said Iran is prepared to promote a peaceful settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh, but he made it clear he disapproves of the involvement in this process of the United States, which together with Russia and France is one of the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group. Velayati said the Azeri territory currently occupied by Armenian forces should be liberated without the involvement of exterior powers. Velayati also called on the countries of the South Caucasus to coordinate their efforts to prevent a strengthening of US influence in the region. US oil companies are represented in three international consortiums engaged in developing Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea oil fields.

05/01/1997 - Aliyev offers Armenia pipeline in return for "territories" - Reuter:

Azerbaijan's President Gaidar Aliyev said Thursday he was prepared to consider building an oil pipeline through Armenia if Yerevan agreed to the return the so-called occupied territories. Armenia has so far ruled out a deal involving territory for a pipeline, which could win it big transiting fees for taking millions of tons of Azeri oil to world markets. Aliyev had also rejected the involvement of a pipeline in a peace settlement over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, but when asked about it on Thursday at a briefing for foreign journalists in Baku he said: "Such a variant could be considered." No comment was immediately available from Yerevan. If a pipeline were to be built, it would probably be funded by a 13-member international consortium led by British Petroleum and Norway's Statoil Den norske state oljeselskap.

05/02/1997 - Armenia Rejects Aliyev Proposal on Pipeline - Fact, Itar-Tass (Asbarez-on-line):

A proposal by Azeri president Gaidar Aliyev to run a proposed oil Caspian pipeline through Armenia, on the condition that Armenia withdraw from the so-called "occupied territories" was rejected by Armenia, announced the foreign ministry Friday. Armenian foreign ministry spokesperson Arsen Gasparyan stated that Aliyev's proposal was unacceptable, explaining that the so-called "occupied territories" issue and the oil pipeline were not interrelated, making the discussion futile. Gasparyan stated, however, that "it has been evident to all that the most profitable route for the pipeline is through Armenia."

05/05/1997 - IMF confirms new loan to Azerbaijan, sets conditions for Armenia - RFE/RL:

IMF executive Tapio Saavolainen has confirmed the fund's December 1996 decision to lend Azerbaijan \$230 million in 1997-1998 to underpin economic reform, AFP and Interfax reported. Saavolainen, who was in Baku on 2 May to meet with President Heidar Aliev, praised Azerbaijan's cooperation with the IMF. Meanwhile, an IMF delegation began talks in Yerevan on 1 May on conditions for disbursing the third tranche of a 1996 credit worth \$150 million. Disbursement is contingent on improvements in tax collection and the reduction of Armenia's \$580 million foreign debt.

05/05/1997 - Council of Europe official on Azerbaijan's membership chances - RFE/RL:

Leni Fischer, the chairwoman of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, says swift progress toward a settlement of the Karabakh conflict will facilitate the entry of both Azerbaijan and Armenia into the council, Reuters and Turan reported on 1 May. Fischer was speaking to Azerbaijani officials in Baku last week. She said a final decision on Azerbaijan's application for full membership will be made following a visit to Azerbaijan by a CE delegation of experts. Fischer met with Milli Mejlis chairman Murtuz Alesqerov, President Heidar Aliev, and Foreign Minister Hasan Hasanov.

05/05/1997 - Signature de sept accords entre la Turquie et l'Azerbaïdjan - AFP:

La Turquie et l'Azerbaïdjan ont signé lundi à Ankara sept accords et une déclaration portant sur la coopération bilatérale à l'occasion d'une visite officielle en Turquie du président Gueïdar Aliev. Ces documents concernent la coopération dans la navigation aérienne et maritime, les sports, la sécurité sociale, l'énergie électrique et l'industrie, en présence de MM. Demirel et Aliev. Les deux hommes ont pour leur part signé une « déclaration pour le développement de la coopération stratégique » entre les deux pays, a-t-on indiqué de source présidentielle. Dans cette déclaration, les deux parties ont notamment indiqué leur souhait de voir l'acheminement de la production pétrolière de trois champs azerbaïdjanais en mer Caspienne vers les marchés occidentaux via la Turquie. La Turquie avait proposé un projet d'oléoduc reliant les champs pétrolifères de la Caspienne au terminal turc de Ceyhan-Yumurtalik sur la Méditerranée pour cet acheminement. L'itinéraire définitif n'est pas encore décidé. Ankara et Bakou ont également exigé le « retrait sans condition ni réserve des troupes arméniennes des territoires azerbaïdjanais occupés », pour faciliter un retour des réfugiés. Ankara soutient diplomatiquement Bakou contre les Arméniens indépendantistes dans le conflit du Nagorno-Karabakh. Le Nagorno-Karabakh est une « partie indivisible » de l'Azerbaïdjan, selon le document. MM. Demirel et Aliev ont qualifié la signature de ces documents de « détermination des deux pays à développer les relations bilatérales ». M. Aliev était arrivé dans la matinée à Ankara pour une visite qui se terminera vendredi, en compagnie d'une importante délégation, comprenant notamment le vice-premier ministre Abid Sherifov et le ministre des Affaires étrangères Gassan Gassanov.

05/09/1997 - Aliev accuses Turkey of insufficient support - RFE/RL:

Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliev has accused Turkey of inadequate financial support for Azerbaijan, Interfax and Asbarez reported, citing the Armenian-language Turkish newspaper Marmara. Addressing

the Turkish parliament on 6 May, Aliev complained that Turkey's EximBank was demanding Azerbaijan pay interest on a \$70 million credit drawn by the previous Azerbaijani leadership. He added that Ankara has refused a request for \$117 million in aid and that Turkish companies are investing in Central Asia but not in Azerbaijan. Aliev called on Turkey not to expand trade with Armenia. He also implicated unnamed Turkish political figures in the so-called coup attempt of 17 March 1995. Democratic Left Party leader Bulent Ecevit responded by calling for an official investigation, the Turkish Daily News reported yesterday.

05/12/1997 - US invites Aliyev for first official visit to US - Reuter:

The United States has invited Azeri President Gaidar Aliyev to make the first official visit since the former Soviet republic gained independence in 1991, officials from both countries said Monday. An Azeri presidential spokesman said Aliyev's visit was likely take place in July or August. US Embassy spokesman Richard Brown confirmed the invitation. The invitation comes after recent signs that Washington would like to step up efforts to mediate a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azeri officials said the US invitation could lead to warmer relations and the eventual removal of US legislation barring government aid until Baku ends the economic blockade of Armenia. Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright discussed the Karabakh conflict earlier this month during talks in Moscow. Aliyev has twice visited the United Nations, but has never been invited for an official visit to Washington.

05/13/1997 - Azerbaijan claims Armenia has chemical weapons - RFE/RL:

Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliev claims Armenia has been supplied with five truckloads of "defensive" chemical weapons and ten truckloads of "offensive" ones, Moskovskii komsomolets reports today. Armenia ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention in March 1994. Last week, Armenian First Deputy Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian expressed concern that

Azerbaijan has not yet done so, according to Noyan Tapan on 8 May.

05/14/1997 - Russian oil company to boost cooperation with Azerbaijan - RFE/RL:

Aleksandr Putilov, the board chairman of Russia's Rosneft oil company, and Natick Aliev, the president of the Azerbaijan State Oil Company, say they will soon sign an accord on "strategic partnership," Russian agencies reported yesterday. Putilov, who was in Azerbaijan earlier this week, proposed to Azerbaijani President Aliev that a consortium of Russian and Azerbaijani oil companies be established to develop an unspecified oil shelf in the Caspian Sea. Putilov said the consortium might include LUKoil, which is the only Russian company so far involved (through its membership in Western consortia) in multibillion-dollar contracts with Azerbaijan. Putilov added that his proposals had the backing of Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Aliev said Baku is "interested" in cooperating with the Russian oil industry.

05/19/1997 - Azerbaijan belatedly ratifies CFE flank agreement - RFE/RL:

The Azerbaijani parliament ratified the 1996 CFE flank agreement on 16 May, 24 hours after the official deadline for doing so expired, ITAR-TASS reported. A senior official in Baku told Interfax yesterday that the provision stating that signatory states may cede part of their armament quotas to Russia or permit the stationing of Russian troops on their territory does not apply to Baku. Azerbaijan was the last signatory state to ratify the accord. The Moldovan parliament approved it on 15 May, according to BASApress.

05/29/1997 - Iran obtains 10% share in Azerbaijan's fifth oil consortium - RFE/RL:

Natick Aliev, president of Azerbaijan's state oil company, SOCAR, signed an agreement in Baku on 27 May with representatives of Iran's OIEC oil company. According to Interfax on 28 May, the agreement finalizes OIEC's acquisition of a 10% stake

in the consortium to exploit Azerbaijan's Lenkoran-Deniz and Talysh-Deniz oil deposits. The two fields are located on the Caspian shelf and have estimated combined reserves of 80-100 million metric tons. The major partners in the consortium are France's Elf-Aquitaine (40%), SOCAR (25%), and Total (10%). The German company Deminex and Belgium's Petrofina are reportedly negotiating for 10% and 5%, respectively, of the remaining undistributed share. On 28 May, SOCAR signed a preliminary agreement with Russia's LUKoil on exploring the Yalama deposit, off Dagestan.

06/03/1997 - Azerbaijani Georgian comment on Russia-NATO accord - RFE/RL:

An unnamed Azerbaijani government spokesman told Interfax on 30 May that the country's leadership welcomes the signing of the Russia-NATO agreement because "the calmer the situation in relations between Russia and NATO, the calmer it is for other countries." Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili told journalists the next day that Georgia will not raise the issue of possible NATO membership "either today or in the near future" as the country is not ready for it. But he said that Georgia welcomes cooperation with NATO within the Partnership for Peace program. Menagharishvili said that full membership in the Council of Europe is currently more advantageous to Georgia than NATO membership, given the role the council can play in guaranteeing the stability and economic development of the Transcaucasus, ITAR-TASS reported.

06/05/1997 - Exxon négocie avec l'Azerbaïdjan - AFP:

Le géant pétrolier américain Exxon négocie un contrat exclusif avec les autorités azerbaïdjanaises pour pouvoir explorer deux zones importantes de la mer Caspienne en quête de pétrole et de gaz, a indiqué jeudi un porte-parole de la compagnie. Les deux grandes zones de réserves soupçonnées couvrent une superficie de quelque 800 km², à une distance de 80 à 120 km au sud de Bakou, la capitale azérie, a indiqué Fred Marshall, joint au téléphone à Houston par l'AFP. Selon le porte-

parole d'Exxon, la compagnie américaine s'arrangerait avec SOCAR, l'entreprise pétrolière détenue par l'Etat azéri, pour une exploitation conjointe de la production des gisements offshore, conformément à un protocole d'accord conclu il y a un an. Le contrat permettrait à Exxon d'entreprendre des études de sismologie et de forer les deux zones pour confirmer la présence d'hydrocarbures, a poursuivi M. Marshall. « Il est trop tôt pour dire combien coûtera le projet », a-t-il ajouté. Le président de la SOCAR, Natig Aliyev, avait indiqué mercredi à l'agence de presse azérie Turan qu'une nouvelle série de négociations avait démarré avec les compagnies pétrolières étrangères concernant les gisements offshore de l'Azerbaïdjan. Selon lui, un nouveau contrat était sur le point d'être conclu avec le géant pétrolier américain Chevron, et un consortium japonais conduit par la Japan National Oil Company s'apprêtait à faire des propositions sur trois secteurs prometteurs de la mer Caspienne.

06/07/1997 - Prêt de la Banque islamique à l'Azerbaïdjan - AFP:

La Banque islamique de développement (BID) a annoncé samedi l'octroi d'un prêt de 13 millions de dollars à l'Azerbaïdjan pour l'aider à réaliser des projets d'infrastructure. Ce prêt de la BID, un organisme de l'Organisation de la Conférence Islamique (OCI), est remboursable en 20 ans, avec un délai de grâce de cinq ans, a indiqué un communiqué de cette banque, basée à Djeddah, dans l'ouest de l'Arabie saoudite.

06/10/1997 - Almaty et Bakou lancent un nouveau projet d'oléoduc régional - AFP:

Le Kazakhstan et l'Azerbaïdjan ont appelé les compagnies pétrolières étrangères à financer un projet conclu mardi entre les deux républiques ex-soviétiques visant à exporter le pétrole kazakh vers les marchés occidentaux en traversant la mer Caspienne. Cet appel a été lancé à Almaty, capitale du Kazakhstan, à l'occasion de la visite dans cette ex-république soviétique d'Asie centrale du président azerbaïdjanais, Gueïdar Aliyev. Jusqu'à maintenant, les projets d'oléoducs destinés à exporter les

trois milliards de tonnes de réserves avérées de pétrole du Kazakhstan contournaient la mer Caspienne et devaient traverser, pour atteindre la Turquie ou le Golfe persique, soit le territoire russe, soit l'Iran. L'accord prévoit l'exportation du pétrole kazakh par tankers entre Aktau (port kazakh de la Caspienne) et Bakou, la capitale azerbaïdjanaise. Ensuite, le pétrole kazakh passera par le territoire géorgien pour atteindre les terminaux pétroliers turcs de la mer Noire, où il sera embarqué à destination de l'Europe, via la Turquie. Le Kazakhstan et l'Azerbaïdjan prévoient également, dans l'accord paraphé mardi, la construction d'un oléoduc traversant la mer Caspienne destiné à accélérer l'exportation du pétrole kazakh sur le même trajet.

06/17/1997 - Consortium assesses export pipelines - RFE/RL:

Representatives of the Azerbaijan International Operating Company [AIOC] told journalists in Baku that the choice of the export pipeline for Azerbaijan's Caspian oil will be decided on economic rather than political grounds, according to "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 17 June. AIOC vice president Gregory Rich said the Baku-Ceyhan route favored by Turkey is the most expensive and would be economically disadvantageous to Azerbaijan. He added that the export of Azerbaijan's oil via Ukraine, although technically feasible, may be economically disadvantageous since the AIOC plans to sell the oil in question to southern European countries. Rich said he doubted that either Turkey or Ukraine could afford to pay world prices for Azerbaijan's oil for domestic consumption. On 13 June, Azerbaijan's parliament ratified an agreement between the state oil company SOCAR and a consortium of European and Iranian companies to develop the Lenkoran-Deniz and Talysh-Deniz deposits, Interfax reported.

06/19/1997 - Aliyev to discuss oil transit problems in Moscow - RFE/RL:

Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev has suggested that he and Russian leaders will resolve all "problems" related to the transit of early Azerbaijani oil when they meet in

Moscow on 3 July. Aliev, however, added that there is no need to sign a new agreement on the pipeline from Azerbaijan to Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiisk because Moscow did not implement the previous one, signed in 1996. The 153-km sector of the pipeline runs through Chechnya. Aliev argued that "we cannot transport our oil along that route, given the current relations between Russia and Chechnya," according to Interfax. Russian and Chechen leaders recently signed a memorandum paving the way for the export of Azerbaijani oil. But despite Moscow's opposition, Grozny insists that a similar three-party agreement be signed by Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and Russia.

06/20/1997 - Uzbek President on resolving Nagorno-Karabakh issue - RFE/RL:

Islam Karimov on 19 June said at a joint news conference with Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliev that there cannot be "two Armenian states in the Caucasus," Interfax reported. Karimov described Baku's position on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as correct and fair. Azerbaijan is demanding restoration of its sovereignty over the disputed enclave. Aliev, who was wrapping up an official visit to Tashkent, said Azerbaijani-Uzbek relationships have reached "new heights" and that the two presidents share views on "numerous" international issues. A total of 19 bilateral agreements were signed during his visit.

Politique intérieure et droits de l'homme / Domestic policy and human rights

04/15/1997 - Baku court sentences islamists - RFE/RL:

Following a seven-week trial, a Baku court yesterday sentenced four members of the banned Islamic Party of Azerbaijan to 10-11 years in prison on charges of treason. Public prosecutor Bahram Zahidov told Turan last week that the men have given written testimony that they collaborated with, and received funding from, Iranian intelligence "in the name of the victory of Islam in Azerbaijan." Reuters, however, quotes party leader Alikram Aliev as denying in court any involvement with the Iranian security services and claiming that the trial was "a

provocation set up by the KGB." A fifth man received a two-year sentence for preparing false passports for the other accused.

04/15/1997 - Azerbaijan censors cut article on detained former interior minister - RFE/RL:

Azerbaijani parliamentary chairman Murtuz Alesqerov has threatened to revoke the mandates of deputies who signed an appeal calling for the release of former Interior Minister Iskander Hamidov from solitary confinement. An article reporting that 20 deputies (both opposition and pro-government) have requested clemency for Hamidov because of his failing health was scheduled to appear in Zerkalo on 12 April but was cut by the censors, according to the Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan. Hamidov, head of the nationalist Grey Wolves, was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in 1995 for large-scale theft of state property. Although Zerkalo routinely appears with blank spaces where censors have cut material deemed inappropriate for publication, President Heidar Aliev continues to insist there is freedom of the press in Azerbaijan.

04/24/1997 - Former Azerbaijani prime minister charged - RFE/RL:

Gazi Mamedov, the lawyer of former Azerbaijani Prime Minister Suret Huseinov, told journalists in Baku yesterday that his client has been charged with large-scale embezzlement and with "exceeding his authority," Turan reported. The Azerbaijani leadership has accused Huseinov of planning a coup against President Heidar Aliev in October 1994 and of drug smuggling. Criminal charges, however, have not yet been brought against him. Last month, Huseinov was extradited to Baku from the Russian Federation where he had been living since late 1994.

04/30/1997 - Azeris sentence Armenian to death - Noyan Tapan (Asbarez-on-line):

The Military Judicial Board of the Azeri Supreme Court sentenced Karen Gevorgian to death last week for unspecified crimes. According to reports received in January, Gevorgian confessed that he had

committed a murder to avenge his dead brother. However, according to information received in April, he has been charged with espionage and acts of sabotage. At the same time it was reported that he had not pleaded guilty. On the night of Jan. 1, after returning from his border post, Gevorgian got lost in the thick fog. According to the available data, Gevorgian was not a member of the intelligence group of the Armenian Armed Forces. According to an officer of the Armenian Army who spoke on condition of anonymity, attempts to present Gevorgian as a terrorist may be used by Azerbaijan to force Armenia to release Azeri POWs. Obviously, Gevorgian was tortured into a confession and if he had committed any illegal actions on Azerbaijan territory, they can be qualified as self-defense and not murder. "The verdict by the Military Judicial Board of Azerbaijan passed in relation to Gevorgian is inhuman, while charges brought against him are made up," the same source reports. The source says that the death sentence was given to Gevorgian at the time when the entire world, including Azerbaijan is trying to abolish the death penalty.

05/01/1997 - L'ancien président Aboulfaz Eltchibey fait un retour en politique - AFP:

L'ancien président azerbaïdjanais Aboulfaz Eltchibey, chassé du pouvoir par une rébellion militaire en juin 1993, s'est fait élire à la tête d'une coalition de sept partis d'opposition, prélude à une éventuelle candidature à la présidentielle prévue en 1998, a indiqué jeudi l'agence Interfax. Selon l'agence, M. Eltchibey a été porté à la présidence de la coalition du « Congrès démocratique », qui réunit le Front populaire et six autres partis favorables à un rapprochement avec l'Occident au détriment de la Russie. L'actuel président Gueïdar Aliev, ancien dirigeant de l'ère soviétique qui gouverne l'Azerbaïdjan d'une main de fer, est arrivé au pouvoir dans le sillon de la rébellion militaire qui avait renversé M. Eltchibey. Les revers subis alors par l'Azerbaïdjan dans sa région séparatiste du Nagorny-Karabakh, peuplée en majorité d'Arméniens, ont été une des causes principales de cette rébellion. M. Eltchibey, qui mena une politique pro-turque pendant un

peu plus d'un an au pouvoir, a vécu ces dernières années dans sa région natale du Nakhichevan, non loin de la frontière turque.

05/02/1997 - Elchibey, Gambar elected chairmen of Azerbaijani opposition - OMRI:

Former Azerbaijani president Abulfaz Elchibey and Musavat Party chairman Isa Gambar were elected co-chairmen of the Democratic Congress bloc on 30 April, Interfax and RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reported yesterday. The bloc unites seven pro-Western right wing opposition parties.

05/21/1997 - Azerbaijani opposition parties sign cooperation agreement - RFE/RL:

Isa Gambar and Vagif Kerimov, leaders of the Musavat and National Democratic Independence Parties, yesterday signed an agreement on regular consultations and cooperation in the forthcoming local election campaign and in combating separatism and bribery, Turan reported. The agreement is the latest of several cooperation accords between opposition parties, which have only seven seats in the parliament.

05/29/1997 - Azerbaijan's President slams draft dodgers - RFE/RL:

Heidar Aliyev called on 28 May for the abolition of concessions to students enabling them to avoid military service, according to Interfax. Addressing a meeting to mark the anniversary of the proclamation of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, Aliyev said that "defense of the Fatherland and restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity is the chief task for young people in our country." Interfax quoted an unnamed member of the Azerbaijani government as saying a planned military parade to mark the anniversary was canceled the previous day because it could have been misinterpreted by foreign observers.

06/04/1997 - Lezgins claim Azerbaijan is persecuting ethnic minorities - RFE/RL:

The Russian State Duma's Committee on Nationality Affairs has recently held hearings on the plight of the Lezgins, Nezavisimaya

gazeta reported on 3 June. The Lezgins are a Caucasian ethnic group whose traditional homeland straddles the frontier between the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan. Shamil Murtuzaliyev, chairman of the Union of Muslims of South Dagestan, claims that the Azerbaijani leadership has launched a harsh campaign of repression against the 1.2 million Lezgins in Azerbaijan and other ethnic minorities, including the Avars and Kurds. He also claims that Baku has banned the Lezgin National Movement, Sadval. Azerbaijan's Lezgins are lobbying for the transfer of the raions where they live to Russia and for dual (Azerbaijani and Russian) citizenship to facilitate communication within families whose members live on either side of the frontier.

06/23/1997 - Elchibey poised to return to Baku - RFE/RL:

Former Azerbaijani President Abulfaz Elchibey said he will return to Baku "in two or three months," Reuters reported on 22 June. Elchibey told the agency's correspondent in the autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan that he will take part in the 1998 presidential elections "if conditions are democratic." Elchibey was overthrown in May 1993 as the result of a military coup that brought to power incumbent President Heidar Aliyev. Elchibey, who still considers himself the country's legitimate leader, claimed that his return to politics would not be aimed at destabilizing the situation in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani Prosecutor-General Eldar Hasanov warned that Elchibey's activities violated "not only ethical but also the criminal and civil norms of the country" since he is falsely representing himself as president.

DOCUMENTS

05/20/1997 - Oppression continues in Azerbaijan - ANCA Fact Sheet:

Excerpts from the *Human Rights Watch World Report 1997* section dealing with Azerbaijan, pages 199-201.

« The treason trials of President Heydar Aliyev's personal enemies, brutal treatment in detention, and continued repression of free speech stood in grim contrast to the

Azerbaijan Government's efforts to join international human rights institutions.

« Continued ill treatment in detention demonstrated how far Azerbaijan has to go in order to conform with Council of Europe standards and with the torture convention. At least two individuals died in pre-trial detention as a result of brutal beatings.

« The fallout from three years of coup attempts and alleged assassinations attempts on President Aliyev culminated in a series of trials and convictions marred by serious due process violations. In at least four cases, the prosecution lodged accusations of participation in the March 1995 coup attempt log (up to a year) after the arrests of the accused on illegal weapons charges.

« The government continued to stifle political speech. Government censors routinely refused to allow publication of issues of opposition newspapers that continued articles criticizing President Aliyev, and the government closed the only independent television station in four counties.

« Nakhichevan police routinely harassed Women's Rights Society activists at the Nakhichevan airport in an obvious attempt to block the flow of information to Baku on political prisoners in the area. The Ministry of Justice repeatedly refused to register the Committee for Human Rights and Democracy, citing among other things, the organization's failure to provide copies of the founder's passports, which is not among registration rules. »