



**WASHINGTON, D.C. March 14, 2008**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

**FROM: Edward B. Robin, Chairman;  
Lesley Israel, NCSJ President;  
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

In Brief: State Department Report on Anti-Semitism; Student Leadership Mission to Moscow

Dear Friend:

Earlier this week, the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism released its Report on Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism. It is an important document and required reading to better understand the current state of anti-Semitism around the world. In this week's update, we have attached a link to the full report, and have included several articles that highlight the State Department's findings.

You may remember that NCSJ and a number of our member agencies were instrumental in supporting the creation of this office. NCSJ has developed a good working relationship with the head of the office, Gregg Rickman, and his staff. This report is another positive example of the work that is being done by the U.S. government in the fight against global anti-Semitism.

In the next few days, on our web site will be a summary of the report, focusing on the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Tensions continue to mount in Armenia over last month's election. There is a brief background report on the current situation and articles on the election, Georgia's ongoing problems and the latest difficulties between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

NCSJ, in conjunction with the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and American University Hillel are sponsoring a Student Leadership Mission to Moscow. The ten person student delegation is now in Russia, joining their Moscow Hillel counterparts in a week-long conference focusing on leadership development and advocacy training. Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs is overseeing the mission and will make a full report on the trip when the group returns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark B. Levin'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'L'.

Mark B. Levin  
Executive Director



Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,  
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. March 14, 2008

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## **#1**

### **State Dept. targets anti-Semitism JTA Brief, March 13, 2008**

A U.S. State Department report on anti-Semitism targets its manifestation as anti-Zionism and excoriates its appearance in the U.N. system.

The 94-page report published Thursday departs from traditional State Department reports on other forms of discrimination and other human rights abuses in addressing overarching themes of anti-Semitism and not simply listing incidents.

"Anti-Semitism has proven to be an adaptive phenomenon," the introduction says. "New forms of anti-Semitism have evolved. They often incorporate elements of traditional anti-Semitism. However, the distinguishing feature of the new anti-Semitism is criticism of Zionism or Israeli policy that -- whether intentionally or unintentionally -- has the effect of promoting prejudice against all Jews by demonizing Israel and Israelis and attributing Israel's perceived faults to its Jewish character."

It targets governments that sponsor anti-Semitism, including in Iran, Syria, Belarus, Venezuela, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Also cited is how Israel is singled out in the United Nations.

"Regardless of the intent, disproportionate criticism of Israel as barbaric and unprincipled, and corresponding discriminatory measures adopted in the U.N. against Israel, have the effect of causing audiences to associate negative attributes with Jews in general, thus fueling anti-Semitism," it says.

## **#2**

### **State Report Cites Growing Anti-Semitism**

**By BARRY SCHWEID**

**Associated Press, March 13, 2008**

New forms of anti-Semitism are emerging around the world, promoting prejudice against Jews by attacking Israeli policy and Zionism, the philosophic underpinning of a Jewish state, the State Department reported Thursday.

While common throughout the Middle East and in Muslim communities, the new anti-Semitism is not confined to those populations, said the report, prepared by the office of the special envoy for monitoring anti-Semitism.

For example, the report cited frequent requests to the United Nations to commission investigations of reports of alleged atrocities and other human rights violations by Israel.

Unremitting criticism of Israel is mounting, the report said, and Israeli policy is sometimes likened to the Nazis. At the same time, the report to Congress said, there is a failure to pay attention to regimes guilty of grave violations.

This has the effect of reinforcing the notion that the Jewish state is one of the greatest sources of abuse of the rights of others "and thus, unintentionally or not, encourages anti-Semitism," the report said.

While Israel's policies and practices must be subject to criticism and scrutiny to the same degree as other countries', "those criticizing Israel have a responsibility to consider the effect their actions may have in promoting hatred of Jews," the report said.

It was issued with a tribute to Tom Lantos, the Holocaust survivor who was chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee until his death last month. Lantos, instrumental in persuading the State Department to monitor anti-Semitism, was praised as "a leader of moral force and a champion of human rights."

His successor, Rep. Howard Berman, D-Calif., said in a statement that the report "provides evidence of a disturbing resurgence in anti-Semitism around the globe."

"All too often, legitimate criticism of the state of Israel can veer into naked anti-Semitism characterized by vile hate speech," Berman said. "And all too often it goes unchallenged."

The report singles out Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a Holocaust denier whose government practices official anti-Semitism against its Jewish minority, and the Syrian government as routinely demonizing Jews.

In Belarus, state enterprises produce and distribute anti-Semitic material, and in Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez has publicly demonized Israel and used stereotypes about Jewish financial influence and control, the report said.

Government media in Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have become "vehicles for anti-Semitic discourse," the report said.

### #3

#### **Putin - Not so much pro-Jewish as free from anti-Semitism**

**By Anshel Pfeffer**

**Ha'aretz, March 8, 2008**

A Jewish leader once asked Russian President Vladimir Putin, how did someone like you with good relations with Jews, ever survive in an anti-Semitic organization such as the KGB. Putin answered that it was the domestic branch that was busy persecuting Jews and he served with the foreign intelligence directorate.

Not an entirely accurate answer, Putin worked for the KGB in Leningrad before being posted in East Germany, but setting that aside, and disregarding for a moment the obviously sycophantic attitude of the questioner, there is a near consensus that Putin, whose successor was elected this week and will step down in two months, has been pro-Jewish throughout the eight years of his presidency. Even severe critics of his democratic record, such as former minister Natan Sharansky, admit that it's hard to fault Putin's record when it comes to his attitude towards the Jewish community.

Many Jewish institutions were founded and flourished under his administration and while certainly far from being eradicated, many Jewish leaders, not all of them Putin-supporters, claim that he had little tolerance for the inbred Russian anti-Semitism.

When it comes to Russia, this is obviously not such a trivial thing. Russia-gazers are split over the correct historical analogy, is Putin a modern-day reincarnation of the pre-Bolshevik Czars or Joseph Stalin's spiritual heir? Both concepts give rise to disturbing memories.

With a few notable exceptions, the Russian Czars enacted anti-Semitic legislation, subjecting the Jews to inferior status and forcing them to live in the pale of settlement far away from the large cities. They routinely saw pogroms and blood libels, instigated from above, as a useful way for keeping the masses happy. From this period originated the call - "beat the Jews and save Russia."

Stalin was arguably worse, with anti-Semitism playing a major role in his murderous purges, and his paranoia of Jews during his last years leading to the "doctor's trials." Many believe that before his death he was planning the mass expulsion of Jews from Russia to the far eastern wastes of the Soviet empire.

But the anti-Semitic tendencies of the Russian dictators are hardly surprising when one considers the people they lead. Being pro-Jewish is certainly a political liability in a country where one of the slurs directed by nationalist parties at this week's victorious presidential candidate, Dmitry Medvedev was that he was actually a Jew.

So how can we explain Putin's supposed philosemitism? Some see its origins in his St Petersburg childhood, in which he apparently had a large number of Jewish friends, neighbors and teachers. This is probably true but Putin is hardly a creature of sentiment. He has said to a number of Jewish leaders who have met him that in his opinion, one of the major policy mistakes of the U.S.S.R.'s communist leaders was their crackdown on Jewish organizations and cultural activity and the deep suspicion with which they regarded any contact between Soviet Jews and their brethren in Israel and the rest of the world.

In a Russia which is facing a demographic crisis of negative growth, Putin certainly views the emigration of an estimated two million Jews, to Israel, North American and Germany, as a net loss of highly-educated and

productive citizens. His government has set and supported a number of official and semi-official organizations whose objective is to maintain contact with these expatriates and if possible, persuade them to return to the rodina. The Foreign Ministry has even begun financing Jewish cultural events for Russian Jews around the world, such as a Hanukah party in Berlin.

Of course, not everyone is convinced. There is conflicting data, but some research groups insist that there has been no reduction in anti-Semitic incidents. Others see disturbing tones in the relentless persecution of the Yukos oligarchs, most of whom are Jewish. There is also a very instrumental side to his pro-Jewishness. Putin tried to use influential Jewish allies to get the Jackson-Vanick amendment, hampering trade relations with the United States, repealed. He has cynically used the anti-Semitism issue to attack his rival, Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko, who he also accused of being under "Zionist" influence. And besides, how can he be so pro-Jewish if he visits Ahmadinejad in Tehran and Russia is building a nuclear reactor for the Iranians and supplying them with nuclear fuel.

There are answers of course to all these question marks. Even Putin is incapable of wiping out a thousand years of Russian anti-Semitic tradition. The oligarchs he took down set themselves up as political rivals and at the same time, many of the oligarchs currently in favor within the Kremlin are also Jewish. Neither Israel nor the Americans have officially criticized Russia over its ties with Iran, some officials have even said that Putin might be effectively controlling the Iranian regime and preventing it from going too far. And of course, he puts what he regards as Russian interests before any consideration. If that means using his ties with Jewish organizations to his benefit, he has no problem with that. Indeed, there is a distinct element of divide and rule to his attitude, Jews on his side get preferential treatment, the others are frozen out.

Perhaps it would be more to describe Putin, not as being pro-Jewish, but as being released from his predecessors' anti-Semitic complexes. As a calculating politician, he understands the contribution Jews have made to Russia's fortunes over the centuries and the influence of Jewish organizations on the international scene. Putin will become prime minister upon leaving the presidency and will almost certainly remain the ultimate source of power in Russia. Will he remain a reliable ally in the future? It is stupid to try and make predictions but it is useful to remember one thing. As a rule, Jewish communities flourish most in democratic societies. The worst persecutions have always been under dictatorships. After a brief fling with democracy, Russia is firmly back on the path to autocracy and Medvedev's electoral coronation is ample proof of this.

#### **#4**

#### **Look Out Below. The Arms Race in Space May Be On.**

**By STEVEN LEE MYERS**

**New York Times, March 9, 2008**

IT doesn't take much imagination to realize how badly war in space could unfold. An enemy — say, China in a confrontation over Taiwan, or Iran staring down America over the Iranian nuclear program — could knock out the American satellite system in a barrage of antisatellite weapons, instantly paralyzing American troops, planes and ships around the world.

Space itself could be polluted for decades to come, rendered unusable.

The global economic system would probably collapse, along with air travel and communications. Your cellphone wouldn't work. Nor would your A.T.M. and that dashboard navigational gizmo you got for Christmas. And preventing an accidental nuclear exchange could become much more difficult.

"The fallout, if you will, could be tremendous," said Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington.

The consequences of war in space are in fact so cataclysmic that arms control advocates like Mr. Kimball would like simply to prohibit the use of weapons beyond the earth's atmosphere.

But it may already be too late for that. In the weeks since an American rocket slammed into an out-of-control satellite over the Pacific Ocean, officials and experts have made it clear that the United States, for better or worse, is already committed to having the capacity to wage war in space. And that, it seems likely, will prompt others to keep pace.

What makes people want to ban war in space is exactly what keeps the Pentagon's war planners busy preparing for it: The United States has become so dependent on space that it has become the country's Achilles' heel.

"Our adversaries understand our dependence upon space-based capabilities," Gen. Kevin P. Chilton, commander of the United States Strategic Command, wrote in Congressional testimony on Feb. 27, "and we must be ready to detect, track, characterize, attribute, predict and respond to any threat to our space infrastructure."

Whatever Pentagon assurances there have been to the contrary, the destruction of a satellite more than 130 miles above the Pacific Ocean a week earlier, on Feb. 20, was an extraordinary display of what General Chilton had in mind — a capacity that the Pentagon under President Bush has tenaciously sought to protect and enlarge.

Is war in space inevitable? The idea of such a war has been around since Sputnik, but for most of the cold war it remained safely within the realm of science fiction and the carefully proscribed American-Soviet arms race.

That is changing. A dozen countries now can reach space with satellites — and, therefore, with weapons. China strutted its stuff in January 2007 by shooting down one of its own weather satellites 530 miles above the planet.

"The first era of the space age was one of experimentation and discovery," a Congressional commission reported just before President Bush took office in 2001. "We are now on the threshold of a new era of the space age, devoted to mastering operations in space."

One of the authors of that report was Mr. Bush's first defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, and the policy it recommended became a tenet of American policy: The United States should develop "new military capabilities for operation to, from, in and through space."

Technology, too, has become an enemy of peace in space. Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative was considered so fantastical by its critics 25 years ago that it was known as "Star Wars." But the programs Mr. Reagan began were the ancestors of the weaponry that brought down the American satellite.

The Chinese strike, and now the Pentagon's, have given ammunition to both sides of the debate over war in orbit.

Arms control advocates say the bull's-eyes underscore the need to expand the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, which the United States and 90 other countries have ratified. It bans the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on the Moon.

Space, in this view, should remain a place for exploration and research, not humanity's destructive side. The grim potential of the latter was hinted at by the vast field of debris that China's test left, posing a threat to any passing satellite or space ship. (The Pentagon said its own shot, at a lower altitude, would not have the same effect — the debris would fall to earth and burn up.)

The risk posed by space junk was the main reason the United States and Soviet Union abandoned antisatellite tests in the 1980's. Michael Krepon, who has written on the militarization of space, said the Chinese test broke an unofficial moratorium that had lasted since then. And he expressed disappointment that the Pentagon's strike had damaged support for a ban — which the Chinese say they want, in spite of

their 2007 test. "The truth of the matter is it doesn't take too many satellite hits to create a big mess in low earth orbit," he said.

The White House, on the other hand, opposes a treaty proscribing space weaponry; Mr. Bush's press secretary, Dana M. Perino, says it would be unenforceable, noting that even a benign object put in orbit could become a weapon if it rammed another satellite.

A new American president could reverse that attitude, but he or she would have to go up against the generals and admirals, contractors, lawmakers and others who strongly support the goal of keeping American superiority in space. The reason they cite is that the United States depends more than any other country on space for its national security. It's only a slight exaggeration to say that an M1-A1 tank couldn't drive around the block in Iraq without them.

And so, research continues on how to protect American satellites and deny the wartime use of satellites to potential enemies — including work on lasers and whiz-bang stuff like cylinders of hardened material that could be hurled from space to targets on the ground. "Rods from God," those are called.

For now, such weapons remain untested and, by all accounts, impractical because the cost of putting a weapon in orbit is huge. "It is much easier to hold a target at risk from the land or sea than from space," said Elliot G. Pulham, who heads the Space Foundation, a nonprofit group in Colorado Springs.

Democrats in Congress, in particular, have opposed explicit authorization of space weapons programs. But John E. Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, an organization that studies military and space issues, has noted a spike in recent years in secret "black budget" spending by the Missile Defense Agency. The idea, he said, is, "If you desire peace, prepare for war."

Mike Moore, author of a new book, "Twilight War: The Folly of U.S. Space Dominance," argued that such logic is misguided. The belief that the United States can or should dominate space, he said, only prods others to respond.

"Why trigger an arms race?" he asked. "The United States has the most satellites up there, and we have the most to lose." Nevertheless, he acknowledges, "These kinds of thing have a momentum of their own."

## **#5**

### **Russian-speaking lawmakers form group**

**JTA Brief, March 9, 2008**

Jewish Russian-speaking legislators formed a parliamentary club.

More than 20 lawmakers from Israel, the United States, Ukraine and Russia met March 6-7 in Kiev to establish the body, under the auspices of the World Congress of Russian Jewry, to represent at parliament level Russian-Jewish interests in the former Soviet Union and abroad.

They discussed legislative issues, as well as problems facing Russian-speaking Jews.

Club organizers say the aim is to facilitate the dialogue and understanding among countries with large populations of Russian-speaking Jews.

During a meeting with Yuriy Kostenko, Ukraine's first deputy minister of foreign affairs, the legislators talked about optimizing visa rules between Israel and Ukraine and pension benefits for Jewish citizens born in Ukraine, as well as Ukrainian participation in the celebration of the 60th anniversary of Israel's statehood.

New York state Assembly member Alec Brook-Krasny, who has secured funding for lifesaving health screenings for many Russian Americans, spoke about compensating Israeli citizens and Americans who participated in relief and rescue operation in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant blast and

those who suffered after the tragedy. Brook-Krasny helped secure \$540,000 in the New York state budget for Chernobyl relief.

The forum was held at the initiative of the president of the World Congress of Russian Jewry, Boris Shpiegel, who serves in the Council of Federation, the upper house of the Russian Parliament.

Eight Israeli Knesset members, including deputy chairman Yuli Edelstein, and Amnon Kohen, attended the meeting.

The congress on Friday issued a statement condemning the terrorist attack on the Mercaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem.

## **#6**

### **Bellicosity in Belarus**

**By Tsothe Bakuria**

**The Washington Times, March 9, 2008**

The recent arrest of Alyaksandr Zdzvzhkou, deputy editor-in-chief of Zhoda newspaper in Belarus, should not surprise anyone familiar with this black hole of a European country.

His crime? Reprinting Muhammad cartoons that appeared in a Danish newspaper two years ago and which were copied from a Web site. The editor, accused of inciting ethnic and religious enmity was sentenced to five years in prison.

The purpose of this incarceration by President Alexander Lukashenko, often referred to as "the last dictator in Europe," was to show the country his support for Muslim fundamentalism. And no doubt to draw more ire from the West, which has called for the president, recently included in Parade magazine's roundup of the world's worst dictators, to stop illegal arms sales to terrorists. The outspoken, anti-Semitic president, who altered the constitution years ago to effectively make him dictator-for-life, threatens to become the most dangerous leader in the world.

The regime in Belarus — a small country of 10 million — is as corrupt and evil as they come. Syria, Iran and North Korea are strategic allies. Belarus, during 2001 alone, secretly sold \$500 million in arms to Syria and its terrorist faction, the Hezbollah, that used the deadly Katyusha rockets against Israel.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, his henchmen were found carrying Belarusian passports. If another terrorist attack succeeds in the United States, it will be because of Mr. Lukashenko, unabashedly clinging to his Stalinist tactics and disregard for international law.

Belarus inherited a stockpile of weapons after the fall of the Soviet Union and has supplied them steadily to countries that sponsor terrorism, including North Korea, Iran and Syria. There has been little diplomatic intervention and indeed, the Mad Man of Minsk relishes his image as the arms dealer of choice among the ruthless and deadly defenders of radical Islamism, who would die happily if they had another chance to attack innocent Americans.

Iran became the main partner of Belarus after Saddam's ouster. Large sums of money were necessary for the president to maintain authority in his own country, and weapons were readily salable. Mr. Lukashenko has since become a veritable Shopping Home Network for 9119 anti-tank guided missiles for Syria, T-55 tanks for North Korea and aviation engines for SU-27 (Russian-made bomber airplanes) to Iran. Belarus also sells "Mi" and I-76 military airplanes to Iran. In 2003, Belarus sold 100 of the planes to Iran.

Both presidents share a deep and ugly hatred of Jews and the United States. Not one to mince words, the president of Belarus described his feelings in a live radio broadcast last October in the country's central port city of Bobruisk. "This is a Jewish city and the Jews are not concerned for the place they live in. They have

turned Bobruisk into a pig sty. Look at Israel — I was there." How the civilized world in 2008 could accept that sentiment is beyond understanding.

There's more. Because of NATO, customers in Eastern Europe joining the organization have a hard time with Mr. Big. But not with rogue states who continue to thumb their noses at America's efforts to stem the arms trading. And it's not really about cartoons. It's about the dark and painful era of Stalinism versus a broad and hopeful future. The current U.S. administration has done little to help the Belarusian people to overcome this tyrant. It is to be hoped the White House's next occupant will address this wrong.

You may not know where Belarus is on the map. But you will.

*Tsotne Bakuria, who lives in Washington, D.C., is a former member of the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia and is writing a book on post-Soviet emerging democracies.*

**#7**

**Georgia: Tbilisi Outraged At Moscow Withdrawal From Abkhaz Sanctions Treaty**  
**By Ahto Lobjakas**  
**RFE/RL, March 7, 2008**

Tbilisi officials have decried as "immoral and dangerous" Russia's decision to withdraw from a CIS treaty imposing sanctions on Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on March 6 announcing the country's withdrawal from the 1996 treaty, citing "changed circumstances."

The treaty, which bans trade, economic, financial, transport, and other links with Abkhazia, was signed by 12 members of the CIS.

Georgia and Abkhazia have been locked in a protracted standoff over the region's ambitions to split from Georgia.

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili has made a political priority of returning to Georgian control Abkhazia and a second breakaway region, South Ossetia. But both regions receive financial and political support from Russia and have recently used Kosovo's independence declaration to launch their own bids for self-declared independence.

'Bad News'

Georgian parliament speaker Nino Burjanadze, reacting to Russia's decision to withdraw from the treaty, says Tbilisi was caught "by surprise" by the "very bad news."

Burjanadze told RFE/RL in Brussels that Georgia had been optimistic that the two countries were making headway toward improving their rocky relationship.

However, she says, Georgia can only interpret Russia's withdrawal from the CIS treaty as a move toward Russia's formal annexation of Georgian territory.

"When they [Russia] are saying they are stopping [the] economic embargo [against] Abkhazia, it means that they are going, step by step, in the direction of the annexation of this territory. This is nothing if not an attempt of annexation," Burjanadze said on March 7.

In its statement to the CIS Executive Committee on March 6, Russia said the rationale for its decision to withdraw from the treaty was to induce Abkhazia to adopt a more flexible position with regard to the return of Georgian displaced persons to their homes in Abkhazia. The statement noted that most Georgians who

wished to return have done so, and that the primary obstacle to others doing so is Georgia's refusal to agree to the rules for their registration proposed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The statement also said that, unlike Georgia, Abkhazia is "fulfilling its obligations" on conflict resolution, and is ready for "practical steps for strengthening confidence and security in the conflict zone." Russia called on other CIS members states to follow suit.

But Burjanadze says she sees other designs behind Russia's move, and expects Moscow to openly start supplying Abkhaz separatists with weapons and other supplies. Russia has already issued passports to a majority of residents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia -- a tactic that Burjanadze describes as "illegal."

She also believes the move can be seen as the Kremlin's response to Kosovo's recent declaration of independence from Serbia, a Russian ally. The Kremlin was fierce in its opposition to the West's support for Kosovo's move, and warned repeatedly that it could set a dangerous precedent for other separatist conflicts.

During his annual start-of-the-year news conference on January 23, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that "many people assume that Russia has such a firm position on Kosovo and warns that [its declaration of independence] will set a precedent just because it [secretly wants this] to happen in order to begin recognizing" other regions declaring independence near Russia. But he insisted that "the Russian leadership has never said that after Kosovo we will immediately recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

However, Russia's conciliatory statements have increasingly been replaced with tough talk since Kosovo's declaration of independence on February 17 -- placing the Western darling Georgia in the middle of the fray.

"Russia now is using the politics of sticks and carrots toward Georgia. It gives certain hopes and concessions -- be it the softening of various sanctions imposed on Georgia, or its statements about not transferring the Kosovo 'precedent,' Archil Gegeshidze, a Tbilisi-based political analyst, tells RFE/RL. "But in another hand it is holding a stick, and is trying to also hurt you."

## NATO Debate

Parliament speaker Burjanadze also said the timing of the Russian move was carefully gauged to coincide with the March 6 NATO debate in Brussels on whether to grant Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP).

"This is [a message] which was not sent only to Georgia, but to NATO member countries [whose foreign ministers were meeting in Brussels], and the main goal of Russia here is to create obstacles on our way to NATO," Burjanadze said.

Germany, France, and other NATO skeptics of closer ties with former Soviet countries such as Georgia argue the alliance cannot afford to "import" any of their so-called "frozen conflicts."

Burjanadze told RFE/RL that as one of Moscow's foreign-policy priorities is to halt NATO's expansion, Russia will do "everything, all the time, to keep these conflicts unresolved."

She also said Georgia feels "frustration" at what she described as Russia's "unpredictability."

"What is the main problem of Georgian-Russian relations? The main problem is that Russia is unpredictable," Burjanadze said.

Analyst Gegeshidze, however, says the Russian Duma's decision to withdraw from the 1996 CIS agreement banning trade, economic, financial, transport, and other links with Abkhazia, was not so surprising.

"This is an unfriendly move from Russia's side towards Georgia, however not an unexpected one, in light of general situation, and the background of Kosovo in particular," Gegeshidze says.

Russia's decision to lift the embargo on Abkhazia will likely have negative repercussions on Moscow's efforts to gain Georgia's approval for Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Georgia, a member of the WTO, has blocked Russian accession, demanding Russia first establish customs and border control checkpoints on its borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Any such deal would also commit Russia to accommodating for and securing the presence of Georgian officials at the same checkpoints.

Burjanadze said that hopes had been high in Tbilisi that such a deal could be achieved after recent top-level meetings between Russian and Georgian officials. But, she said, as on a number of occasions before, Russia now appears to have backtracked on commitments made at recent meetings.

#### Prisoner Releases

Meanwhile, two Georgians held in jail for more than a week in Abkhazia have been released despite charges by authorities in the de facto republic that they illegally crossed the unrecognized border.

The detentions had further inflamed tensions between Tbilisi and the separatist leadership in Sukhumi.

Television stations in Georgia broadcast live footage of Malkhaz Basilaia and Davit Tsotsoria being escorted by Georgian peacekeepers across the Enguri Bridge that links Abkhazia to Georgia proper.

Basilaia, Tsotsoria, and Tsotsoria's mother were arrested on February 26 in Abkhazia's Gali district, which is predominantly populated by ethnic Georgians. They were placed in prison in the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi. Tsotsoria's mother was released on March 1, but Tsotsoria and Basilaia, a television reporter, remained in detention until March 6, charged with "illegally crossing the Abkhaz border."

Abkhaz leader Sergei Bagapsh told reporters there were no additional charges pending against the two men, and were free to be released after 10 days.

In his first statement after being released, Basilaia claimed he had endured harsh treatment during the 10-day detention.

"For 10 days, we went through suffering [and] torture, but we never lost hope in our government, in our people, that they would not let us down and leave us there by ourselves," Basilaia said. "I was put in solitary confinement for three days, then they moved me to an ordinary cell."

Tsotsoria, by contrast, had no complaints about his treatment, saying that "the Abkhaz treated us very well" and "did not pressure us in any way."

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili had issued a strict ultimatum to the Abkhaz authorities while Basilaia was still in detention, saying Georgian police would forcibly retrieve the journalist from jail if he was not released. Abkhaz authorities said the ultimatum only resulted in prolonging Basilaia's and Tsotsoria's detention.

#### **#8**

#### **Estonia plans U.S. visa deal next week**

**By David Mardiste**

**Reuters, March 7, 2008**

Estonia is to sign a deal with the United States next week allowing Estonians to travel there without visas, but it insisted on Friday that the agreement would not undermine European Union policy.

The Baltic country, one of the newer EU members, wants to join the U.S. visa waiver program which offers visa-free travel but seeks passenger data that is more intrusive than in the bloc.

"We are planning to sign the Memorandum of Understanding on this issue on March 12," Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip told a news conference after meeting his Latvian counterpart, Ivars Godmanis.

Latvia has also said it wants to be involved in the waiver program.

"But we (Estonia and Latvia) are both certain that our decisions cannot contradict European union regulations or our own state laws," Ansip added.

The Czech Republic angered the executive European Commission and a number of older member states when it signed a deal last week to make it easier for Czechs to travel to the United States visa-free in exchange for enhanced air security cooperation.

Critics say the pact infringes on the EU's authority over visa and border policy and are afraid Washington may use such deals to press member states to hand over more detailed personal data on air passengers.

A senior U.S. official said this month the United States could scrap visa requirements for Czechs, Greeks and Estonians by the end of this year.

## **#9**

### **Latvia approves Nazi march United Press International, March 7, 2008**

A Latvian parliamentary official said authorities in the capital of Riga have approved an event to honor Latvians who fought alongside the Nazis.

The authorities gave their approval to veterans group Daugavas Vanagi to stage a March 16 street march to commemorate former Latvian soldiers that fought for the Nazis and Waffen-SS during World War II, RIA Novosti, a Russian news agency, reported Friday.

The event is planned for Latvian Legion Day, which commemorates a March 1944 battle that resulted in Latvian troops preventing Soviet forces from advancing. The public holiday was abolished in 2000, but it continues to be celebrated unofficially.

A march marking the day in 2005 ended with dozens of arrests after participants clashed with Russian protesters.

## **#10**

### **OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs Call on Azerbaijan and Armenia to Restore Confidence along the Line of Contact Trend News Agency, March 8, 2008**

The three Minsk Group Co-Chairmen - Ambassador Yury Merzlyakov of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Bernard Fassier of France and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza of the United States - issued a joint statement, the OSCE reported.

Starting in the early hours of 4 March, shooting began on the frontline of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the occupied territory of Azerbaijan in several directions. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said that during the gun fire with Armenia, 12 Armenian soldiers were killed and 15 more were injured, whereas four Azerbaijani soldiers were killed and injured.

"The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs deeply regret the tragic loss of life on March 4 along the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Co-Chairs call on the parties to restore confidence along the

Line of Contact and desist from any further confrontations, escalation of violence or warmongering rhetoric," the statement says.

"The Co-Chairs reiterate that there is no military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "The outbreak of hostilities would destabilize the entire region, with calamitous consequences for all involved. The recent casualties and loss of life only underscore the urgent need for both sides to reach to an agreement peacefully through ongoing negotiations under the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. The Co-Chairs reiterate their support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and that Nagorno-Karabakh's status is the subject of negotiations," the statement says.

The conflict between the two countries of the South Caucasus began in 1988 due to Armenian territorial claims against Azerbaijan. Since 1992, Armenian Armed Forces have occupied 20% of Azerbaijan including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and its seven surrounding districts. In 1994, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a ceasefire agreement at which time active hostilities ended. The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Russia, France, and the US) are currently holding peaceful negotiations.

## **#11**

### **Troubling news from the Caucasus The Economist, March 6, 2008**

THE day after Dmitry Medvedev's presidential victory, Moscow's leading papers turned their attention away from the long-predicted result to the unexpected bloodshed in Armenia. At least eight people were killed in clashes between security forces and opposition supporters protesting against alleged fraud in the country's presidential elections. "An election won with some blood", ran the headline in Kommersant, a leading business daily.

Small, complicated and with names that are hard to spell, Armenia has long been out of the mainstream of world news. Yet what happens in this country has implications not only for the whole of the Caucasus, a region vital for Europe's energy security, but also for Russia. The story of rigged elections, corrupt officials and dead protesters is particularly unnerving for Russia, a country that prides itself on its stability.

On February 19th Armenia held presidential elections. The incumbent prime minister, Serzh Sarkisian, assisted by a biased media and occasional stuffing of the ballot boxes, won 53% of the vote. If the election had been conducted fairly, there is a good chance he would have faced a second round and a possible defeat. But Mr Sarkisian had the backing of Robert Kocharian, the current president, which swung the result. (Mr Kocharian, it is said, fancies the job of prime minister—not unlike his Russian counterpart.)

International observers did not cover themselves in glory. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe pointed out many shortcomings, yet said in an initial statement that the ballot was "mostly in line with the country's international commitments".

The opposition, led by Levon Ter-Petrosian, an academic and Armenia's first president, demanded a re-run of the election. His supporters took to the streets. Mr Ter-Petrosian is no democratic angel. In 1996 he is widely believed to have rigged the presidential election in his favour. Still, those who voted for him this time did so largely in protest against the local mafia, corruption and unemployment now associated with Mr Kocharian.

For 11 days the government put up with the peaceful protest. But on March 1st, the police moved in on the pretext that protesters were carrying firearms, which some observers say were planted. Mr Ter-Petrosian was placed under de facto house arrest and the crowd was dispersed. Predictably it regrouped and gathered in front of the French embassy in Yerevan. Mr Kocharian sent in the army, and the area was soon lit up with tracer fire.

Eight people were killed, cars were torched and shops were looted. Many protesters were armed with stones and metal poles. But the responsibility ultimately lies with the government which allowed the

situation to deteriorate into chaos. The state of emergency now imposed by Mr Kocharian for 20 days, including a media blackout and the arrest of opposition figures, may temporarily suppress the protests, but it is unlikely to resolve the underlying problems.

These include corruption, low living standards and an economic blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey because of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian-populated enclave inside Azerbaijan that was conquered by Armenia in 1994. This conflict has long been frozen. But three days after the violence in Yerevan, Armenian and Azerbaijani forces were involved in their worst firefight in a decade. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan accuse each other of starting the skirmish, which caused a disputed number of deaths on both sides.

Claiming that Kosovo's declaration of independence last month has emboldened Armenian separatists, Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliiev, has given warning that he is buying weapons to retake Nagorno-Karabakh by force, if necessary. A renewed war could destabilise the region and jeopardise a strategic oil pipeline to Turkey that runs only 15 kilometres (ten miles) from the ceasefire line.

Nagorno-Karabakh remains an open sore. Mr Ter-Petrosian's downfall in 1998 was mainly caused by his hints of a more flexible approach to a peace settlement with Azerbaijan. Both Mr Kocharian and Mr Sarkisian are from Nagorno-Karabakh and fought in the war, but they have done little to move towards peace. In a recent commentary in the Washington Post, Mr Ter-Petrosian dismissed the notion that only hardliners from Nagorno-Karabakh can solve the conflict. Indeed, he argues that Mr Sarkisian, whose presidency is now marred by bloodshed and incompetence, will be even less able to govern.

Russia and the West have an interest in Armenia's stability, and they need to work to maintain it. This could be Mr Medvedev's first foreign test as president.

## **#12**

### **Armenia Constitutional Court rejects opposition suit Reuters, March 8, 2008**

The Armenian Constitutional Court on Saturday rejected opposition claims last month's presidential vote was rigged and stood by the verdict of the country's central election commission.

Outgoing President Robert Kocharyan declared a state of emergency in Yerevan on March 1 after eight people were killed in clashes between police and protesters who said the election was fixed to deny the opposition a victory.

President-elect Serzh Sarkisyan, who won 53 percent of the vote, defended the emergency laws as necessary. His rival, former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who won 21.5 percent, filed a suit to the Constitutional Court.

The Court confirmed there were violations during the vote and asked prosecutors to investigate. The Court said in a statement the violations did not provide enough evidence to question the election result.

## **#13**

### **Armenia: Vote Observers More Critical By SABRINA TAVERNISE New York Times, March 8, 2008**

An election observation team from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe issued a second report on the presidential election that handed an overwhelming victory to the prime minister, delivering a more negative assessment of the Feb. 19 vote and its recount than it initially gave. The report documented numerous cases of violence, including a case in which a domestic observer lost consciousness, and "implausibly high voter turnout" at a number of polling stations. It assessed the vote count at 17 percent of the stations as "bad or very bad" and reported "significant procedural errors," including placing ballots on the wrong candidate's pile.

## **#14**

### **Uzbekistan gives U.S. limited use of Termez base**

**By Maria Golovnina**

**Reuters, March 5, 2008**

Uzbekistan will allow U.S. nationals to use its Termez airbase under strict conditions, officials said on Wednesday, almost three years after ordering out U.S. troops in a row over human rights.

Robert Simmons, NATO's envoy for the Caucasus and Central Asia, said Uzbekistan had agreed to allow limited numbers of U.S. staff to use the facility near Afghanistan, which was once used by Soviet forces and currently operated by Germany.

"We welcome the fact Uzbekistan has shown readiness to allow other countries to use this airbase," he was quoted as saying in Moscow by Russian news agencies. "As far as I understand, the United States is beginning to use this facility."

The U.S. embassy in Tashkent said that under the arrangement US staff would use Termez only as part of wider NATO operations in Afghanistan.

"Individual Americans attached to the NATO International Staff can use the German air-bridge from Termez to Afghanistan on a case-by-case basis," the embassy said in a statement sent to Reuters. It did not elaborate.

The United States originally set up camp at another Uzbek airbase, known as K2, to run operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, when Uzbekistan was an ally in the U.S.-declared war against terrorism.

But Uzbekistan ordered all U.S. troops out of the country in 2005 when the West condemned it for firing on protesters in the town of Andizhan. Only German personnel at Termez were allowed to stay in the country.

Witnesses said hundreds of people were killed when troops opened fire on Andizhan protesters in 2005. Uzbekistan blamed the violence on Islamist rebels and has accused the West of interfering in his domestic affairs.

U.S. Admiral William Fallon visited Tashkent in January in a first high-level attempt to mend ties since 2005. It was unclear if the Termez arrangement was agreed then.

Uzbekistan's government has made no public statements pointing to a shift in its position on U.S. troops.

A Western diplomat in Tashkent said the Termez deal involved allowing U.S. military personnel to use the base as a transit point on their way to and from Afghanistan.

"I understand...U.S. soldiers will be able to fly via Termez but only aboard German aircraft," the diplomat said. "I don't know if there are any similar agreements with other nations."

Moscow takes a dim view of any U.S. military presence in Central Asia and has accused Washington of sparking a new arms race by beefing up its military presence around Russia.

## **#15**

### **Belarus Demands U.S. Ambassador Leave Minsk**

**By Andrew Tully**

**RFE/RL, March 8, 2008**

Relations between Belarus and the United States worsened today when the government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka recalled its ambassador from Washington and demanded that the U.S. envoy leave Minsk.

Belarus said it is responding to sanctions imposed by Washington on the state-controlled oil and chemical company Belneftekhim.

#### 'Forced' To Act

Anatol Krasutski, the deputy chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in Belarus' House of Representatives, told RFE/RL today from Minsk that the Lukashenka government had no alternative but to act.

"This step was forced upon us, and it may lead to a search for some sort of a compromise," he said. "But, I repeat, the American side forced us to take this step."

In Washington, a White House spokesman said the development serves only to further isolate Belarus.

U.S. State Department spokesman Tom Casey said President George W. Bush is "deeply disappointed" at Belarus's decision.

#### Not Leaving Now

But Casey stressed that U.S. Ambassador Karen Stewart hasn't left Belarus and will stay there for the foreseeable future.

"[Stewart] is in Minsk and she'll remain in Minsk while we continue to review the situation," he said. It's important, we think, to have our embassy there in Minsk and to have high-level diplomatic representation there to engage with the Belarusian government on a number of concerns."

In announcing its demand, the Foreign Ministry in Minsk pointed to the Belneftekhim sanctions imposed last autumn. Washington froze that company's assets and forbade U.S. companies to do any further business with it.

Along with the European Union, the United States also has imposed economic and travel sanctions against Belarus until Lukashenka agrees to release political prisoners and allow and institute more democratic reforms. The travel restrictions include Lukashenka himself and his close associates.

Minsk acted on the same day the European Commission agreed to open an office in Belarus. Belarusian political analyst Andrej Fyodarau said the two actions may be linked.

#### 'Good Cop/Bad Cop'?

"I wouldn't rule it out because there does indeed seem to be some movement in [Belarusian] relations with Europe," he said. "Maybe that's why we're taking this tack with the U.S. In other words, we won't give them an inch. At the same time, our trade with America is not too big. But I wouldn't rule out another version either: It might be that this situation is being played out by the West according to a 'good cop /bad cop' scenario. One side (Europe) is heading toward cooperation, albeit slowly. The other side (the United States) is getting tougher."

Lukashenka has recently been making friendly overtures to the West ever since Russia began to drastically increase the price of oil it exports to Belarus -- prices Belarus has trouble paying.

Earlier this year, Lukashenka ordered the release of several political opponents from prison as a gesture to the West. Washington welcomed the releases, but said it wouldn't start talks on improving relations unless he freed one more prisoner, Alyaksandr Kazulin.

Kazulin opposed Lukashenka in the 2006 presidential election campaign and was arrested during a protest after Lukashenka won a new term in office.

The Belarusian government freed Kazulin long enough for him to attend his wife's funeral last month, then put him back in prison.

At the State Department, spokesman Casey said it is regrettable that Belarus decided to confront the United States rather than work with it, especially after making the gesture of the initial prisoner release.

"We are appreciative of the fact that they have released several of the political prisoners, and we in fact noted at the time that if they were to release the remaining political prisoners -- very specifically Mr. Kazulin -- then we might be in a position to engage with them and begin a dialogue on how we might be able to improve relations," Casey said. "But frankly if the Belarusian government wishes to shoot itself in the foot, they're welcome to do so."

## **#16**

### **Kazakhstan: Ukraine Wins Promises Of Cooperation, But No Energy Deal**

**By Bruce Pannier**

**RFE/RL, March 6, 2008**

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko arrived in Kazakhstan hoping to secure new deals for Kazakh energy supplies, but he is set to leave with no agreement for more natural gas or oil anytime soon.

Yushchenko's visit to Kazakhstan was planned months ago and timed to coincide with the opening of the "Year of Ukraine" festivities in Kazakhstan. But the renewed disputes that emerged this week between Ukraine and Russian gas giant Gazprom shifted the focus of Yushchenko's visit to trying to strike new deals for supplies of Kazakh oil and natural gas.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, after a meeting with Yushchenko in the Kazakh capital Astana today, briefly raised Ukraine's hopes. "We clearly understand Ukraine's interest in energy resources and, with its large resources and opportunities to increase both oil and gas output in the future, Kazakhstan can potentially meet this need," Nazarbaev said.

But Nazarbaev pointed out that actually increasing energy exports to Ukraine depends on a third party, noting that Kazakh oil is transported to Ukrainian ports through the Russian Transneft oil-transit system, known as the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. He said that Kazakhstan is ready to boost its exports to Ukraine, but that an agreement would have to be sought with both countries and Russia.

Matthew Clements, the Eurasia editor at the London-based Jane's information group, said before the Nazarbaev-Yushchenko meeting that Kazakhstan was unlikely to agree to anything that might jeopardize Kazakhstan's strong ties with Russia.

"Kazakhstan has a closer relationship with Russia than other CIS states or regional states and I think this has been cemented in recent months by the pipeline agreement between Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia," Clements said. "And I think it shows a favorable point of view from Kazakhstan toward Russia and indeed from Russia toward Kazakhstan."

However, Clements continued, "Nazarbaev has shown a great willingness to be quite open-minded in terms of getting as many gas deals as possible into other countries, for instance pipeline and export agreements signed with China; and he's also been very open to the idea of supplying some degree of [gas] across the Caspian towards Europe."

Nazarbaev did venture to say that a deal with Ukraine that does not involve Russia or Russian companies is at least possible. "There is an alternative way to resolve this issue, and that is to reach the Black Sea via Baku," Nazarbaev said. "We're working to restore the old pipeline that runs directly from Baku to the Black Sea, and Kazakhstan has bought out the deep-sea port in Batumi [Georgia] together with its terminals."

For his part, Yushchenko held out the prospect that Kazakh oil could not only be sold to Ukraine, but also transported through Ukraine to other countries in Europe via a Ukrainian pipeline that begins in Odesa on the Black Sea and will eventually reach the Polish port city of Gdansk.

"The goal of the Odesa-Brody [pipeline] project is to deliver Caspian oil to the center of Europe," Yushchenko said. "So we believe there is no alternative to this project. No existing project has been designed to deliver Caspian oil to European consumers by this shortest way."

Talks between the Kazakh and Ukrainian presidents were reportedly cordial, and Kazakhstan is due to send representatives to an energy summit in Kyiv in May. Yushchenko said the Odesa-Brody-Gdansk pipeline project would be among the top issues on the agenda at that summit.

#### **#17**

##### **Rabbi's attackers identified**

**JTA, 03/10/2008**

Ukrainian authorities reportedly identified the four attackers of a Dnepropetrovsk rabbi.

A special unit of the Secret Service and Ministry of Interior Affairs named the assailants who severely beat Rabbi Dov-Ber Baitman, a teacher at the Jewish educational center Shiurey Torah and the anchor of the local Jewish television show "Video-HiTaS," on Jan. 24. The break in the case was reported on the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community's Web site, [www.djc.com.ua](http://www.djc.com.ua)

During the attack after evening classes at the educational center, the suspects also shouted anti-Semitic slurs at Baitman, a Lubavitch-Chabad emissary.

#### **#18**

##### **Prize in Eurasian game**

**By Ariel Cohen**

**The Heritage Foundation, March 7, 2008**

The Russian presidential election in which Dmitry Medvedev — Vladimir Putin's choice as his successor — was confirmed by the vast majority of Russian voters last Sunday, has serious geopolitical implications for the United States. Moscow has already demonstrated that there is going to be more business as usual: Anti-Medvedev demonstrators in Moscow were beaten up and arrested, and gas supplies to Ukraine several interrupted.

One area where Russia is likely to expand its influence is mineral-rich Eurasia, which many in Moscow view as their backyard. The prize of Eurasia is energy resources around the Caspian Sea, primarily in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

From the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains to the Chinese border, Russia will compete with China and the United States for influence and profit. Russia and China are anxious to curry favor with Kazakhstan. They are both interested in its energy and mineral wealth and promise multibillion-dollar investments. Kazakhstan exports most of its oil and gas via Russia, but pipelines to China are already working and will be expanded in the future. Azerbaijan is exporting its oil and gas to Turkey and beyond, bypassing Moscow.

This week, Armenia, which is traditionally supported by Russia, and the oil-rich Azerbaijan traded fire over the 1994 cease-fire line in Nagorno-Karabakh. This happened after Armenian police has killed eight

demonstrators, arrested dozens and beaten up hundreds in the aftermath of the flawed presidential elections that took place last month.

The United States, which opposes Karabakh independence, has clarified to the Armenian government that both domestic violence and escalation of hostilities are unacceptable. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew J. Bryza said that he intends to deliver a stern message in Armenia: "We simply deplore the violence," he told the Associated Press. "That simply can't be repeated." Mr. Bryza said he intends to press the government to lift a state of emergency it declared Saturday. A new war in the Caucasus could disrupt supply of close to 1 million barrels of oil a day flowing from Azerbaijan into the tight global market.

Kazakhstan is far from the conflict in the Caucasus. Despite setbacks, including the spread of international financial instability, President Nursultan Nazarbayev's reform agenda, implemented by Prime Minister Karim Massimov, is largely on track. Mr. Massimov, 42, an economist fluent in English, Russian, Chinese, Arabic and his native Kazakh, has played a key role in Mr. Nazarbayev's modernization program.

The United States has done much to develop the Kazakhstani energy potential and still has much to offer, especially in macroeconomic policy development. The subprime credit crisis has affected not just Kansas, but Kazakhstan too, and its construction boom has ground to a halt.

The United States can also offer Kazakhstan support in developing innovative educational, management training and anti-corruption programs. Kazakhstan will also need U.S. assistance and investment to diversify its natural resources-based economy and develop high-tech, financial services and agriculture. Mr. Massimov is planning to sign later this year a U.S.-Kazakhstan Public-Private Economic Partnership with his U.S. counterparts to accomplish these and other goals.

Kazakhstan's potential is immense. It is 4 times as big as France, currently surpasses Kuwait in oil production, and is projected to export 3 million barrels of oil a day by 2015, more than Iran's current figure. Kazakhstan also has some of the largest reserves of uranium on the planet, and is a major exporter of grain.

U.S. companies have played a leading role in the Kazakh oil industry since 1990s, including developing the giant oil fields of Tengiz and Kashagan, where Chevron and Exxon respectively are major stakeholders. Chevron recently committed to a gigantic, \$900 million environmental clean-up project, becoming Kazakhstan's exemplary corporate citizen.

Yet, some in the United States express concern about state "hyperactivity" in the Kazakhstani economic sector. President Nazarbayev announced in his Feb. 6 state-of-the-nation address, that the state would strengthen its role as an "influential and responsible participant" in the oil and gas business. A Jan. 14 agreement on the Kashagan oil field doubled state-owned Kazmunaigas' share in the project to more than 16 percent.

Mr. Nazarbayev says the state also plans to review underperforming natural resources contracts and will play a greater role in developing heavy industry and infrastructure. True, these are more moderate measures than resource nationalism sweeping the world from Venezuela to Russia, but U.S. policymakers should clarify that the private sector is always more efficient in economic development than the state. Kazakhstan needs to remain investor-friendly and competitive, and should not take U.S. political support and business sector commitments for granted.

Kazakhstan has been clear that it wants to reach out to Europe and the United States. This year, it will launch the Road to Europe economic program, aimed at becoming more compatible with European Union laws, standards and protocols. During his Washington visit, Mr. Massimov and his U.S. counterparts also will discuss Kazakhstan's accession to the World Trade Organization by 2015 or earlier.

Kazakhstan is also reaching out to the Turkic-speaking countries. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey recently signed a protocol to create an inter-parliamentary assembly of Turkic-speaking states. This

assembly would seek advice from councils of elders, called White Beards, including prominent politicians, writers, artists and scholars. In another effort to highlight its cultural prowess and historic Turkic roots, Kazakhstan entered the Oscars this year with an epic film "Mongol," which tells the story of Genghis Khan, builder of the largest empire on Earth. The film got positive critical reviews.

Mr. Nazarbayev has proclaimed the ambitious goal of seeing Kazakhstan ranked as one of the world's 50 most competitive states. Meantime, Kazakhstan remains a model of ethnic stability, where Muslims and Christians, Turkic-speaking Kazakhs and Russian-speaking Slavs, Germans, Jews and Koreans live in harmony.

In 2009, the country will host its third congress of global and traditional religions, and in 2010 will chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in which the United States and Canada also take part.

Kazakhstan, which has engineers serving in Iraq and is providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, is also committed to the global war on terror. It supports moderate Islam and rejects radicals from al Qaeda, Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The United States has important interests riding on ensuring the peace in the Caucasus and improving relations with Kazakhstan and other Caspian states.

## **#19**

### **Medvedev is already the brunt of jokes amid speculation about power sharing**

**Associated Press, March 9, 2008**

A joke circulating among Russians these days has Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev waking up in the Kremlin in 2023 with vicious hangovers.

Putin says to Medvedev: "Which of us is president and which of us is prime minister today?"

"I don't remember," Medvedev replies. "I could be prime minister today."

"Then go fetch some beer," Putin says.

The new odd couple in Russian politics has become ideal fodder for keeping the cherished, and in Soviet times, once dangerous Russian tradition of poking fun at leaders through satirical jokes called "anekdoty."

The latest crop of jokes plays on Russia's new power-sharing agreement - where Medvedev will be sworn in as president May 7 and Putin, his stern mentor and predecessor, will serve under him as prime minister. The jokes tend to tap into the widespread speculation that it's really Putin who will be the boss.

Puns are crucial in many of the jokes about Medvedev, whose last name stems from the Russian word for bear. In one, Putin is asked if he will have Medvedev's portrait in his office.

An angry Putin replies: "I'll put his hide on the floor instead."

Anekdoty have long been a litmus test of public opinion and individual liberties in a country where in the past people faced exile, prison or worse for expressing their opinions directly.

"Anekdoty sometimes live for a day and sometimes survive for centuries," said linguist Sandjar Yanyshv. "They remain the main genre of oral tradition in Russian folk culture."

George Orwell once called the joke "a tiny revolution." Nowhere was that taken more literally than in the Soviet Union, where people circulated jokes at their peril about the country's communist leaders.

Soviet citizens told stories lampooning Josef Stalin's heavy Georgian accent. His successor, Nikita Khrushchev, was ridiculed for his redneck joviality.

Leonid Brezhnev was mocked for his mumbling speech and his later senility, while Mikhail Gorbachev was ridiculed for his reputedly domineering wife and for his short-lived campaign to eradicate alcoholism.

Even after the Soviet Union, the anekdoty tradition survived.

Russians told tall tales built around president Boris Yeltsin's heavy drinking, and even the popular Putin could not escape barbed jokes about his KGB history and his use of salty slang.

Anekdoty remained mostly an oral tradition until the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the first printed anthologies often outsold serious novels.

With the emergence of online media and text messages on cellphones, Russians today can openly joke about their political leaders - although not on national television. "Kukly," or "Puppets," a popular satirical television show on Russian politics, was closed down in 2001 after the Kremlin objected to Putin being lampooned.

Over the years, the Kremlin has tightened controls on the mass media, and that, perhaps, has led to a modest revival of anekdoty.

In the online poll at anekdot.ru, one of the most popular Medvedev jokes is one that clearly pinpoints the puppeteer in Russia's politics.

In the joke, Putin takes Medvedev to a restaurant and orders a steak. "What about the vegetable?" the waiter asks. Putin looks at Medvedev and says, "The vegetable will have steak, too."

## **#20**

### **RFE/RL Listeners in Armenia Find New Ways to Get Uncensored News RFE/RL Release, March 11, 2008**

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty has restored broadcasting on shortwave frequencies to Armenia to counter the government's blackout on independent news.

RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin said today, "It is disappointing that because of restrictions imposed by the Armenian government we have to take this step backward to an outmoded frequency we stopped using in Armenia three years ago, but I'm happy to say it is working."

RFE/RL's Armenian Service reinstated broadcasting on two shortwave frequencies March 8, a week after its regular broadcasts on FM frequencies were taken off the air by its two local affiliates. The affiliates were complying with an emergency decree by President Kocharian that allows only government-sanctioned news to be aired. RFE/RL is the only Armenian language foreign radio in the country.

Broadcasts are now one hour daily on shortwave, instead of the previous three hours on local FM. But all programs can be heard on RFE/RL'S Armenian language website, [armenialiberty.org](http://armenialiberty.org)

RFE/RL has added more news items to the website and is updating its content every hour of every day, to supplement the loss of local FM broadcasting. Statistics suggest the strategy is working. Listenership on RFE/RL's Internet sites for Armenia tripled in March, compared to a month ago.

Listeners are also finding other ways to hear uncensored RFE/RL news. The service is getting reports that Armenian bloggers are posting RFE/RL news on their sites and that RFE/RL news programs are being repackaged and posted on YouTube.

**#21**

**Georgia sees fresh protests over 'rigged' election  
Russia Today, March 10, 2008**

Opposition politicians in Georgia have begun a hunger strike to protest against January's presidential election. They claim the results, which saw Mikhail Saakashvili re-elected, were falsified. Several thousand people have rallied in Tbilisi, calling for a rerun or a recount of the election.

The opposition are also demanding changes to electoral legislation and the dismissal of the head of the Central Election Commission. The leader of the People's Party, Koba Davitashvili, said the opposition would do whatever it takes to get what it wants.

"Our demands remain free elections - both parliamentary and new presidential elections and the release of political prisoners. We'll sit here until they meet our demands," said Davitashvili.

The hunger strike was announced at a protest, which blocked the main street of Tbilisi. However, despite the radical tactics of the opposition leaders, the rally was much smaller than usual.

One large party, the Republicans, did not attend. They've split from the main opposition coalition and will go it alone in the forthcoming parliamentary election.

Undeterred, the remaining members of the coalition vowed to stage a repeat of the events of November 2007, when tens of thousands of protesters blocked Tbilisi's main street for days.

Those rallies ended with violence on November 7, when clashes between police and demonstrators led to the declaration of a state of emergency.

To defuse the crisis, President Saakashvili called a snap presidential election - but the opposition insists the poll was rigged. They want a run-off between Saakashvili and runner up Gachechiladze and have denounced government control over the media.

They say that hunger strikes are the only way to make sure that parliamentary elections in the spring will be fair.

**#22**

**ARE KARABAKH SKIRMISHES MEANT TO DRAW ATTENTION FROM YEREVAN?**

**By Fariz Ismailzade**

**JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION, March 11, 2008**

Azerbaijanis increasingly see the recent wave of cease-fire violations in Karabakh as an attempt by Yerevan to divert attention from the domestic turmoil that has erupted since Armenia's February 19 presidential election. Reportedly, four soldiers from the Azerbaijani side and eight from the Armenian side have died as a result of the worst cease-fire violations in a decade. Although both sides have pledged to observe an agreement on the cease-fire, shootings continue to occur, and reports from March 10 indicate that one more soldier from each side has died.

Both the U.S. State Department and the current chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Finnish Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva, have expressed deep concerns about this unusual outbreak of cease-fire violations. The Armenian and Azerbaijani sides blame each other for starting the fight. Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian told a press conference that "We condemn the acts of the Azerbaijani army, which wanted to utilize the right moment, capture some territories" (Armeninfo, March 4.) Azerbaijani officials have reacted in a similar manner. "The leadership of Armenia is utilizing provocations in order to distract attention from its domestic problems," said Ali Hasanov, the chief of the political department in the President's Office.

Anar Mammadkhanov and Asim Mollazadeh, members of Azerbaijan's parliament, as well as political scientists Rasim Musabeyov, Alimammad Nuriyev, Akif Nagi, and Mubariz Ahmadoglu all put the blame on Armenian President Robert Kocharian and Prime Minister Serge Sarkisian, who won the disputed vote. "Kocharian and Sarkisian, who have butchered their own people in the streets of Yerevan, badly needed a provocation on the front line," said Mammadkhanov (Day.az, March 4.)

While Azerbaijanis are convinced that the cease-fire violation was linked to the bloodshed, political chaos, and turmoil in post-election Armenia, many now wonder what the implications will be. In a March 6 interview with ANS Radio, Eldar Sabiroglu, the press secretary of the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan, rhetorically asked, "What were the soldiers from Armenia doing in Nagorno-Karabakh?" Political scientist Vugar Seidov, in an op-ed for Day.az on March 6, continued the similar theme, stating, "The fact that Kocharian created a provocation in the front line in order to divert attention from domestic affairs proves that Armenia is directly involved in the conflict."

The situation presents a very dangerous precedent. Although cease-fire violations are a regular occurrence along the front line in Karabakh, most of the incidents in the past were minor and not linked to political events in a particular country. This latest case, however, shows that the stability in the Caucasus is very fragile and how the domestic developments and needs of a particular country can shake the seemingly solid balance of power in the front line.

Azerbaijanis blame the international community for once again applying double standards toward both the incident and the overall election situation in Armenia. The soft criticism from the OSCE, Council of Europe, and U.S. Department of State to the brutal crackdown against the peaceful protestors in Yerevan - the official death toll is eight persons - has shocked Baku. A well-known diplomat, who preferred to speak to Jamestown on the condition of anonymity says, "Just imagine the reaction if something like that happens in Azerbaijan. What would happen if our police brought out tanks, shot eight people, and introduced emergency rule, including open official censorship?! The West's sudden warm attitude toward pro-Russian former warlord Sarkisian is surprising.

Many in Azerbaijan have already made up their minds that the only reason why Armenia's authorities are being treated so mildly is the Armenians' ethnicity and religion. This strongly undermines any credibility of the OSCE and Western observers in case of future criticisms of Azerbaijan. Moreover, this plays directly into Moscow's hands, where talk about the West's insincerity is at the top of Kremlin's talking points. Ironically, Azerbaijan did not support Moscow's effort, by the way endorsed by Yerevan, to end OSCE election and democracy monitoring in the region."

There are also analysts who believe that the cease-fire violation was caused by broader geopolitical games unfolding in the Caucasus. Independent political analysts Ilgar Mammadov told Day.az on March 6 that the "cease-fire violation has allowed Moscow to scare off the potential consumers of the Azeri and Turkmen gas." Previously Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev traveled to Hungary and expressed Azerbaijan's interest in joining the Nabucco gas pipeline project, which is designed to deliver Caspian gas to European markets. Gudrat Hassanguliyev, a member of the Azerbaijani parliament, went even further in his thinking regarding the cease-fire violation, by informing journalists that "it was an attempt by Moscow to show to the participants of the NATO Rose-Roth seminar in Baku who is in charge of security issues in the region."

Observers may never know if Russia was directly involved into this cease-fire violation or not. But the double-standards from the West and the clear provocation from Yerevan are increasingly pushing Azerbaijanis more and more toward a military solution to the long-running conflict.

## **#23**

### **Tajikistan: Hizb-ut-Tahrir proclaimed an extremist organization RFE/RL Brief, March 12, 2008**

The Supreme Court of Tajikistan proclaimed Hizb-ut-Tahrir an extremist organization, outlawed its web site, and banned import of its ideological materials (audio, video, brochures).

Aiming to establish a global caliphate, Hizb-ut-Tahrir denounces violence as a means to this end. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is outlawed in Denmark and Germany (where it is suspected to be anti-Semitic), Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and some Arab countries where it is viewed as a terrorist organization.

## **#24**

### **President Elect Dmitry Medvedev and relation with Russian Jewish Community NCSJ Backgrounder, March 12, 2008**

On March 2, Russia elected its new President, Dmitry Medvedev, with over 70 percent of the vote. Dmitry Medvedev is currently First Deputy Prime Minister, and a confidant of President Vladimir Putin. Putin endorsed Medvedev as his preferred successor several months ago, and since then, there has been little doubt about the election's outcome.

Most election observers saw the process as faulty at best. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stated that the election's "democratic potential was unfortunately not tapped." A representative from the Voter's Inter-regional Public Association said, "Russia's new political system, born in 1989, is now in a state of degradation and has been thrown back to Soviet times. We've now come to a point whereby it's not election commissions that prepare and hold elections but the executive power, as it used to be the Communist Party in Soviet times." The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), one of the leading organizations monitoring elections in the region, did not send observers citing "severe restrictions that the Russian authorities planned to place on its work."

Despite these criticisms, Medvedev will still be the one to assume office once Putin finishes his current term. There are many questions circulating about what this new presidency will bring: Will Medvedev be more liberal and open to the West? What type of power-sharing arrangement will he have with Putin? What will his policies be toward the rest of the former Soviet republics?

One of the things we do know is that he has a positive relationship with the Jewish community and the Chief Rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar.

Medvedev has paid several visits to the Jewish community in Russia. On December 11, 2007, Medvedev joined the Chabad JCC in Moscow to celebrate Hanukkah. At this event, Medvedev made several strong comments relating to anti-Semitism in Russia. Regarding extremism and xenophobia Medvedev said, "These phenomena exist; we must not close our eyes to them. It is the state's role to clearly and rigidly fight these manifestations."

Rabbi Lazar has also very vocally supported Medvedev and his policy plans. Upon the announcement of Medvedev's victory, the Rabbi said, "For me, as a representative of one of Russia's traditional religions, particularly important was and is Medvedev's commitment to ensure inter-ethnic and inter-religious peace in the country, the free and dynamic development of religious communities and to stimulate spiritual growth within our society."

Medvedev officially assumes office on May 7. Until that time, speculation about where Medvedev will lead Russia will continue.

We will keep you informed of any new developments related to this issue. For more information on President-Elect Medvedev and the rest of the former Soviet Union, please visit our web site [www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org).

Prepared By: Ben Sack

## **#25**

### **Update on the Caucasus NCSJ Backgrounder, March 11, 2008**

At the beginning of this year, both Armenians and Georgians went to the polls and voted in presidential elections. In both instances, the incumbent party maintained power by a slim margin; and in both cases, the opposition is denouncing the election results as flawed, and are demonstrating in the streets.

In early January, Mikheil Saakashvili won the Georgian presidential race over the main opposition candidate Levan Gachechiladze. The election was hailed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as “the first genuinely competitive presidential election in the country, enabling the Georgian people to express their political choice.”

Despite this, thousands of members of the opposition protested and took to the streets in the capital city of Tbilisi in protest immediately after the election results were posted. This week, the protests have begun a new tactic, a hunger strike. Koba Davitashvili, an opposition leader and head of the People’s Party, said, “Our demands remain free elections – both parliamentary and new presidential elections – and the release of political prisoners. We’ll sit here until they meet our demands.”

It was similar protesting that ended Saakashvili’s presidency in November 2007. Those protests ended in violence when the protestors clashed with police. Saakashvili defused the situation by calling a state of emergency and a snap presidential election.

On February 19, Georgia’s southern neighbor Armenia held their elections. Current Prime Minister Serge Sarkisian won 53 percent of the vote over the main opposition candidate, past President Levon Ter-Petrossian. The first assessment of the election by the OSCE called it “flawed but sufficient for Armenia to fulfill its international obligations.” In a recent review of this assessment, the OSCE has taken a step back and said that a number of voting stations had an “implausibly high voter turnout” and that 17 percent of the voting stations had “significant procedural errors.”

After the results were announced, the opposition began its protests. These demonstrations, led by Ter-Petrossian, remained peaceful for 10 days until riot police deployed to keep order. Police and the protestors clashed on March 1. After a day’s worth of fighting, outgoing President Robert Kocharian declared a state of emergency until March 20.

To this point, clashes between the opposition and the police have resulted in eight people dead and just under 200 injured. Police are using rubber bullets and tear gas, and protestors are igniting cars with Molotov cocktails, as well as throwing bricks and swinging metal rods. Ter-Petrossian has questioned the use of force saying, “Why did the regime headed by outgoing President Robert Kocharian and ‘president-elect’ Sarkisian think it could get away with using force against its own people?”

The OSCE has called on the Armenian government to show “maximum restraint” and release detained opposition members, and has asked both sides to open up a dialogue with the other.

Almost every government of Armenia in its 16 years since independence has been accused of abusing its power. In 1996, Ter-Petrossian became the country’s first elected president, and ordered tanks into the street to quell similar protests.

We will keep you informed of any new developments related to these issues. For more information on Georgia and Armenia politics and the rest of the former Soviet Union, please visit our web site [www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org).

Prepared By: Ben Sack