Russian Federation: Executive Branch
By Susan Cavan

Interference in internal affairs? I'm shocked

With all the sincerity of a Casablanca police officer expressing outrage that gambling is occurring as he pockets his own illegal winnings, Russia has remonstrated against Baltic leaders' comments concerning the bombing campaign in Chechnya, claiming such statements constitute interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. During the OSCE summit in Istanbul, Baltic leaders such as Latvian Prime Minister Andris Skele and Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar called upon Russia to stop its offensive in Chechnya and seek a negotiated solution. Estonian President Lennart Meri stayed away from the summit to protest the OSCE's inefficiency and lack of resolve in dealing with the Chechen issue. At home, Lithuanian Seimas Speaker Vytautas Landsbergis decried the weakness of the summit's declaration concerning the war. "I got the impression that Chechnya had been abandoned for destruction, as Western leaders failed to come up with something more specific and more strict," he said. Estonia's Riigikogu passed a statement strongly condemning Russian actions with a vote of 57 to 1, and no abstentions. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE reports, 18-22 Nov 99)

The response from Russia has been one of supreme irritation. "[P]oliticians are trying to teach us how we should manage our affairs in the Northern Caucasus...," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin said, branding statements by leaders and parliamentarians as "impermissible interference in the interior affairs of Russia." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 23 Nov 99)
While Russian leaders protest the passage of parliamentary statements seeking an end to the attacks on Chechen civilians, they apparently have forgotten their own concerted efforts to influence discussions on state language laws in Latvia and Estonia this past year. Such attempts still have not ended: Recently, the Russian Duma adopted a bill on the imposition of economic sanctions against Latvia in response to the internal affairs of that Baltic country. The bill is the Russian lawmakers' response to the national language law which is due to be passed in the near future in Riga, according to Anatoly Chekhoev, vice chairman of the Duma's Committee for the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relations with Compatriots. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 16 Nov 99) Moreover, the Duma called on the international community to highlight "gross violations of the international law in Latvia," in a statement (passed with 258 votes against one) that criticizes the proposed language law, which is due to be discussed this week in the final reading. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 19 Nov 99)

Meanwhile, one of the leaders of the Russian Citizens Union in Estonia, Pyotr Rozhok, who is campaigning for a seat in the Russian Duma on the For the Soviet Union party ticket, outlined his election platform which would, in effect, seek to increase substantially Russian interference in the internal affairs of Estonia. Rozhok seeks to bring back to Estonia persons who were "forcibly expelled," return to Russians property which had been taken from them, and abolish boundaries, visas and taxes which are being collected on what he describes as ancient Russian property. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 15 Nov 99)

ESTONIA

Court performance verdict: operating so as to endanger
Justice Minister Mart Rask gave the country's court system a highly critical evaluation and warned that society could be imperiled in a letter he sent to Uno Lohmus, chairman of the State Court. At issue primarily is how long many cases
take, since habitual delays undermine the court's authority, the minister said. He cited 926 civilian cases which last year were dragged over 12 months, while nearly one-fourth of all criminal cases took over six months to conclude. "If the administration of justice doesn't work, the society will find other, non-judicial ways for doing justice, in the form of a lynch law," Rask warned. A "notion is gaining ground among ordinary citizens that no protection can be expected from court," he added. Lohmus agreed with Rask's concerns, but warned that an investigation into the causes of these delays would determine whether bad organization, excessive workloads of judges, procedural norms or some other reason was responsible. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 10 Nov 99)

LATVIA

Commission work yields no improvement in corruption perception

Despite active attempts by the government to address the situation, a perception of extensive corruption remains in Latvia, according to a recent poll by the Latvian Center of Criminology Studies. The results indicate that 65.6 percent of persons responding said that corruption was widespread in the country, while 40 percent believed corruption to be exceedingly widespread. In fact, out of the 404 persons questioned, only one said corruption was very scarce in Latvia; none described corruption as scarce. Still, some level of optimism could be found: Nearly one-half of the respondents stated that corruption could be curbed to some degree, although less than 5 percent said the scourge could be eliminated entirely. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 4 Nov 99)

The fight against corruption has remained high on the government's agenda for years. A report prepared by EU experts found problems at all levels of the Latvian government. (OMRI DAILY DIGEST, 19 Dec 96) The following year, Prime Minister Andris Skele announced that "The fighting of corruption has to become one of the main jobs of the state and all people responsible for the use of state funds must be aware that their activities will be scrutinized very closely." (REUTERS, 7 May 97; via Clari.Net) That effort had shown little evidence of
success by last year, when a poll conducted by the international anti-corruption organization Transparency International (TI) indicated that businessmen, international experts and the public believed that Latvia had a high level of corruption in comparison to other countries. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1000 GMT, 23 Sep 98) Results of research by the World Bank a few months later indicated that the abuse of power was expanding. The authorities most affected by corruption are the customs and road traffic police, but the reason underlying the spreading corruption was seen to be the lack of adequate restrictions on the competence granted to public servants, the World Bank's research indicates. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 1024 GMT, 3 Dec 98; via World News Connection) Two months later, however, the World Bank praised Latvia's anti-corruption efforts.

Despite a perceived lack of progress in combating corruption, another poll indicates that the perception does not affect the willingness of a majority of Latvian residents to stay in their country. When asked, most residents said they would reject an offer to move permanently to some Western country. According to the poll conducted by the Sociali Korelativo Datu Sistemas (SKDS) research center, 59.1 percent of the population would rather remain in Latvia, 32 percent would accept the chance to relocate, and 8.8 percent were undecided. While there were some deviations depending on citizenship, more than half of both citizens and non-citizens would opt to stay. The center questioned 2,000 residents between the ages of 18 and 75 in October. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 15 Nov 99)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Chandler Rosenberger and Sarah Miller

Preparing a putsch?
The moment passes, the crisis unwinds. For all the fears of conflict at the Istanbul meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the leaders of Russia and the United States returned home to claim that cooler heads had prevailed. The US administration took pride in shepherding four international agreements to signature -- a revised Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, a summit declaration that made reference to Chechnya, a Charter for European Security founding a rapid reaction civilian force, and a list of confidence-building measures.

In the run-up to the summit and at the height of talks, leaders of the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and states as diverse as Croatia and Pakistan had criticized Russia for its brutal attacks on Chechen civilians and its ominous moves in the South Caucasus. Clutching a fistful of new treaties, however, the US administration declared victory and, after a self-congratulatory tour of southeastern Europe, went home. Still, the White House may have had more cause for satisfaction concerning business it had done on the side -- signing a deal with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey to promote an oil pipeline which could help the countries in question, were it to be built.

As the war in Chechnya continued, and Russia still complained of Georgia's alleged collusion with its foes, the agreements Russia had signed with the West began to look hollow. Was there anything in all the rhetoric and revisions to discourage Russia from overthrowing the Georgian government? The answer, sadly, was no. If anything, agreements to bring civilians into a conflict as negotiators and monitors promised Russia a clean-up crew if a putsch in Georgia should succeed.

**Who is fomenting a new Cold War?**
The day before the OSCE convened its meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov tried to play on the White House's worst fears. Writing in *The Financial Times*, Ivanov worried that Russia’s efforts to move beyond “the abyss of the
Cold War" would come to naught, and accused NATO states of using the conflict in Chechnya as a pretext to promote an "anti-Russian campaign" that was "in the best traditions of the recent past." The campaign, Ivanov wrote, even undermined Russia's confidence that the West would comply with the documents it was to sign. (FINANCIAL TIMES, 16 November 99; via www.financialtimes.com)

Given Russia's failure to adhere to earlier versions of the documents to be revised (BEHIND THE BREAKING NEWS, 1 Dec 99; via www.bu.edu/iscip/bbn.html), Ivanov's bluster might be dismissed as mere chutzpah. But his preemptory accusations that the West was reviving the Cold War served a purpose -- to shield Moscow from the same charge. In the week of the summit, after all, Russian Minister of Defense Igor Sergeev accused the West of conspiring to limit its influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia, while the head of Russia's air force warned that "Russia is not Iraq, nor is it Yugoslavia" and would "deal decisively with any interference." (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 17 Nov 99, and Reuters, 17 Nov 99) Who, one might have asked, was actually heightening tensions -- Russia or the West?

**Pulling the OSCE's punch**

Ivanov's article also set the standards for the OSCE summit -- anything short of signatures on all agreements would be tantamount to reviving the very "Cold War mentality" that US administration officials dread. It was hardly a surprise, then, that the White House put more emphasis on getting pen to paper than on shaping the texts it signed. As a result, the documents that were agreed upon deflated the criticism of Russia that had been growing worldwide, and did little to secure Europe's most vulnerable states.

For all of Russia's huffing and puffing -- including the early departure of President Boris Yel'tsin from the conference's proceedings -- the war in Chechnya was mentioned only once, and then according to Moscow's characterization of events. In Section 23 of the Istanbul Declaration, nations that had earlier dismissed the
campaign against terrorism as a Russian ruse agreed instead to "acknowledge the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and condemn terrorism in all its forms."

Similarly, the declaration's pledges to provide humanitarian assistance to civilians were clouded with caveats such as "creating appropriate conditions." No reason was given why Moscow couldn't argue that subduing the Chechen rebels is one such condition, or that a Russian military victory was not the best way to create the "conditions for stability, security, and economic prosperity in the region" that the declaration promised. (ISTANBUL SUMMIT DECLARATION, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 19 Nov 99; via www.osce.org)

The Russian concession most highly touted by the White House -- a pledge to allow OSCE Chairman Knut Vollebaek to visit Chechnya -- proved empty in the following weeks. Stopping in Moscow to prepare a trip south, Vollebaek found himself cooling his heels while Ivanov pleaded that such a dangerous journey was difficult to arrange. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 30 Nov 99) Who now, one might have wondered, could be accused of violating pledges made in Istanbul?

The US administration was also proud that Russia signed a revised version of the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, since under the new version Russia must remove troops stationed in Georgia and Moldova. The White House, however, made no special effort to ensure Russian compliance with the treaty, despite Russia's long-standing violation of existing limits and its insistence that troops in Moldova's breakaway province of Transdniestr and Georgia's Abkhazia protect minorities. Given the OSCE's emphasis on "peacekeeping," Russia was left with the chance to use purported threats against local populations as an excuse to leave its troops in place.
Indeed, the summit's "Charter for European Security" established more instruments to pursue the policies of "peacekeeping" behind which Russia has so successfully disguised previous moves. Praised as a new means by which the OSCE could intervene across international boundaries, the Rapid Expert Assistance and Co-operation Teams (REACT) are meant to enable the OSCE "to respond quickly to demands for assistance and for large civilian field operations." But as an entirely civilian force of "experts" trained in "conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation," the REACT forces appear to have been given an acronym that is all too apt. (CHARTER FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 19 Nov 99; via www.osce.org) As the experience of Bosnia showed, such grief counselors are typically allowed to deploy only once hostilities have ended.

A Russian-promoted coup in Georgia would no doubt give the OSCE's experts a great deal of "post-conflict rehabilitating" to do. But would the threat of their deployment deter Moscow from seizing power over a region it covets?

Read it as you please

With a little help from administration spin-doctors, the Western media heralded the president's comparison of Chechen civilians to Boris Yeltsin's predicament during the 1991 coup. "If they had put you in jail instead of electing you president," Clinton told Yeltsin, "I would hope that every leader of every country around this table would have stood up for you, and for freedom in Russia, and not said, 'well, that is in an internal Russia affair that we cannot be part of.' " (UPI, 18 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis)

Russian media chose to highlight a different aspect of Clinton's speech, one that undid a growing worldwide consensus that Russia could no longer hide behind the excuse of fighting "international terrorists." (THE NIS OBSERVED, 15 Nov 99) "Clinton declared that the world wants Russia to overcome the evil of terrorism and lawlessness," ITAR-TASS, the Russian state news agency,
announced. "Russia does not merely have the right, but it must defend its stability, the US president declared." (ITAR-TASS, 18 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

If, as some feared, Russia engineers a coup against Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze in the coming months, the highly touted pipeline deal across the Caucasus will be worth as little as the security measures signed in Istanbul. If "lawlessness" is combated in Georgia on the pretext of "fighting terrorism," Russia no doubt will claim that it perceived the US president's words as a green light.

**Russia's anti-western diplomacy**
During the second month of the battle in Chechnya, Russia received some rather noteworthy foreign dignitaries, including Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Iraqi Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. These trips come at a time when Russia is earnestly aiming its "multipolar policy" specifically at Islamic countries.

This week's separate visits by both Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, as well as last April's Russo-Palestinian summit have served to highlight Russia's reinvigoration of its participation in the peace process. (XINHUA, 29 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis) Russia has a keen diplomatic interest in securing an active role in the Middle East peace process. Since 1991 Russia's role in the actual negotiations has been marginal, but during Arafat's visit ways of intensifying Russian involvement in the peace process topped the agenda. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2 Dec 99; via lexis-nexis) For Russia, which does have a historic role in the Middle East and old ties with the Palestinian leadership, rejoining the process now could give a much-needed boost to diplomatic prestige. In this sense, Russia seems prepared to claim a mostly Western and Middle Eastern diplomatic win as its own.
Russia's interests in Iraq are both political and economic. During last winter's Anglo-American bombing, Russia used "anti-unilateral action" rhetoric to gain support from China and other non-Western countries. Throughout the UN Security Council debate over the Iraqi sanctions, Russia and China have stood together, demanding an end to the bombing, withdrawal of the unduly hard-line US stance, and a total removal of sanctions.

But Russia's interests in Iraq extend far beyond diplomatic prestige. Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz's visit was partially an economic appeal to Russia, who is Iraq's largest creditor and the would-be recipient of lucrative oil deals once the sanctions are lifted. (REUTERS, 2 Dec 99; via lexis-nexis) Even without these deals Russia remains a loyal buyer. Under the currently limited Oil-for Food Program, Russia plans to purchase an additional 150 million barrels of Iraqi oil. (INTERFAX, 1529 GMT, 18 Nov 99; via World News Connection) Through these deals, Russia acts as Iraq's key political and economic lifeline against their mutual enemy: the West.

In light of the bad publicity that its Chechen campaign has produced, Russian diplomacy is searching for much-needed foreign policy "wins" wherever possible.

**Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch**

*By Michael Thurman*

**POLITICAL PARTIES**

**Spas movement election registration revoked**

Russian Justice Minister Yuri Chaika got his way. Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky district court revoked the election registration of the extreme Spas (or Salvation) political movement on 12 November. Grounds for disbarring the movement were
that the founding documents for its regional offices contained distortions and falsehoods. Spas claims it will appeal the decision to the Moscow City Court and, should that fail, continue by appealing to the international court in Strasbourg. An additional concern, if not the primary reason for Minister Yuri Chaika’s opposition to Spas, is that at its core sits Alexander Barkashov’s neo-Nazi Russian National Unity party. It seems ironic that a racist, xenophobic party would appeal to an international body born out of the brutal failure of European fascism. (INTERFAX, 1914 GMT, 12 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

Zhirinovsky’s Bloc political platform aired
Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s party running for office, the aptly named Zhirinovsky’s Bloc, has aired a political ad characteristic of his peculiar world view. Noting that Russia needs to sell its products to anyone who will buy, Zhirinovsky proposes expanding trade with such upstanding members of the international community as Iran, Iraq and Libya. He says that the future of Russian trade is not with the world’s richest countries, but with others where Russians “goods are needed.”

Additional ideas include: the re-establishment of a state monopoly on alcohol, tobacco, and sugar, and an amnesty on money taken out of the country illegally, which Zhirinovsky believes will encourage Russians to bring their money home. He also said that the 89 regions which make up the federation should be abolished and the country re-organized into provinces (guberniyas) which would presumably be run directly from Moscow and prevent the harboring of all kinds of groups such as the "Wahhabites" in Tatarstan.

In a more lucid moment, Zhirinovsky suggests taxes be lowered to help small- and medium-sized businesses get on their feet, which in turn will provide a great number of jobs. "This will train everyone to pay taxes in an orderly manner. We may lose some revenue, but people will begin to live better and we will get the money that is lacking by trading more intensively with the South."
Recent polls suggest that the Zhirinovsky Bloc will not overcome the five-percent hurdle required to make it into the Duma on the party list, although a few Zhirinovsky supporters, and even Zhirinovsky himself, may win seats in the single-member districts. What does seem to be happening is that Zhirinovsky is becoming the most respectable voice among the nationalist extremists. However, if he and his party cannot garner even five percent of the vote, what would that say about his party, his person, and his message?

**Yel'tsin and Primakov are the center of the campaign debate**

Although 28 parties/movements have been registered to run for election, only two real poles drive the debate: the Primakov and the Yel'tsin camps. The Communists might win 20 percent of the vote, but their message is fractured and perhaps exhausted. It is telling that, unlike 1995, Yel'tsin's electoral message has framed not the Communists as the threat to the Russian future, but Primakov and Luzhkov. The Communists may remain a party large enough to reckon with for a time to come, but they no longer control the terms of debate and are becoming increasingly marginalized. This is not to say that the alternatives are necessarily better -- witness the rise of neo-fascists -- only that this election may be remembered as the first post-Communist election in Russia. (ITAR-TASS, 1345 GMT, 24 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

The primary issue, whether spoken or not, is who will replace Yel'tsin next June. Primakov seems to be the most likely choice, and for this reason all parties in the election are running against Yel'tsin and Primakov. However slight the relative philosophical differences between a Yel'tsin/Putin presidency and that of Primakov might be, this seems to be the major ideological or personality divide with which Russian voters must make their decision. (INTERFAX, 1821 GMT, 22 Nov 99; via World News Connection)
**LDPR electoral registration reinstated**

The Central Electoral Commission voted to reinstate Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) electoral registration in response to a Supreme Court ruling requiring it to do so. The CEC also removed Zhirinovsky's name from the LDPR list. The commission reversed its own decision of 11 October, when it disqualified the LDPR because of irregularities found in the registration documents submitted by several members on the party list.

This now means that there are two Liberal Democratic slates: Zhirinovsky's Bloc and the LDPR. Electoral law forbids candidates from being on two federal slates at once, so members of one of these slates are going to have to resign, thus invalidating that party's registration. If members of Zhirinovsky's Bloc resign in favor of the LDPR list, the bloc's registration is invalidated, and so is Zhirinovsky's chance for entering the Duma on a party list. (He could, of course, still win a seat in a single-member district.) Should this happen, the LDPR, shorn of its leader, would not stand a chance of reaching the five-percent hurdle for entering the Duma -- not that this is likely anyhow. Members were given 24 hours to make up their minds. If list members decide to remain with the Zhirinovsky Bloc, things return to the status quo ante.

Although Zhirinovsky threw a fit in front of the CEC when the decision was announced, commission chair Aleksander Veshnyakov noted that Zhirinovsky had been informed of the CEC's decision a day earlier. Veshnyakov claims that the histrionics and threats of appealing, again, to the court to invalidate the eventual elections is a public relations stunt aimed at putting Zhirinovsky back on the map. "Another paper, Segodnya [3 Dec 99], thinks that the Central Election Commission managed to diffuse the mine planted under the parliamentary elections. Alexander Veshnyakov was certain that Zhirinovsky had been given a go-ahead for appealing to the Supreme Court after the voting in order to invalidate its results if they failed to please the Kremlin. The Commission
preempted this move by re-registering the LDPR slate and dropping Zhirinovsky from it." (KOMMERSANT-DAILY, 3 Dec 99; Russian Press Digest, via lexis-nexis)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces


The Russian navy: past, present, or future?
Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, in his continuing quest to woo military brass, pledged to restore the Russian navy to its former glory. The navy's precipitous decline over the past decade was a hot topic of discussion at the Russian Security Council meeting on 21 November. At the meeting Putin complained "The trend of driving Russia out from the world ocean is obvious.... Russia became a great power only after it became a sea power." Putin promised to draft a presidential decree on the modernization of the Russian navy. (TASS, 23 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis)

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Klebanov, who is responsible for the defense industrial sector, presented a plan for the modernization. The navy's share of the defense budget would double from 9 to 20 percent, with priority being given to maintaining the nuclear submarine forces. Due to financial constraints, no new surface ships will be built prior to 2007-08, therefore a key element of Russia's sea doctrine will be protecting economic and security interests in coastal zones, not dominating world's oceans. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 24 Nov 99)

However, the Russian navy reminisces about the glory days of the Soviet era. Following the NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo, the Russian navy performed some high-profile military chest pounding aimed at the US. In August an Oscar-class submarine entered the Mediterranean Sea for the first time in four years
and simulated attacks on a US carrier battle group. The American ships chose to ignore it. In September, for the first time since 1997, another Oscar-class submarine shadowed US ships off San Diego, Hawaii, and the Pacific Northwest. On 17 November, the eve of the OSCE summit in Istanbul, a Typhoon-class submarine in the Barents Sea launched two intercontinental ballistic missiles to a distant target on the Kamchatka Peninsula for the first time since 1995. The submarines' tactics revived Cold War memories, however their activity is far less intense. Western analysts believe Russia has only 20 operable nuclear submarines, compared to 200 at the height of the Cold War. (THE WASHINGTON POST, 18 Nov 99) Even in this financially lean period, the Russian navy is experimenting with fixed wing maritime strike aircraft operating from their only aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov. (DEFENSE NEWS, 13 Sep 99) Defense analysts believe these signs of weakness merely reflect the military leadership's frustration at its inability to determine world events.

In the interim, Russian arms manufacturers have turned to the export market instead of waiting for the navy to buy new equipment. The Vympel shipyard is building a new missile boat for export, and India has agreed to buy Russia's latest sea-launched cruise missile, the SS-NX-27, NATO code-name "Alpha." (THE NIS OBSERVED, 18 Oct 99) The Alpha is an advanced, potentially lethal, third-generation cruise missile which has not even entered Russian military service. (DEFENSE WEEK, 29 Nov 99)

Russia's defense priorities are now confusing. Officials have pledged to maintain their strategic rocket forces, rebuild the army, modernize the navy, and even pay special attention to "military aerospace." Russia aspires to world influence via military power, but does not possess the financial resources to satisfy all branches of the military. Putin's budding friendships with the military leadership may face future strains when he doesn't deliver on all promises. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 23 Nov 99)
Russians enter third phase of Chechen operations

General Valery Manilov, deputy chief of the Russian General Staff, announced on 27 November that Russian troops had completed the second phase of "antiterrorist operations" in Chechnya and are now beginning phase three. This third phase, he said, will involve the final extermination of the "terrorist bands" in the Chechen mountains; the restoration of civilian control, normal life and adequate conditions for Chechens returning to their homes; and the securing of the border with Georgia where Russian officials believe the rebels have their escape and supply routes. The objectives of the first and second phases were to "liberate" the Chechen plains. (INTERFAX, 0953 GMT, 26 Nov 99, and ITAR-TASS, 0350 GMT, 27 Nov 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) Senior military officials expect to complete this phase by the end of the year but have hinted that operations could continue for up to three more months. (INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, 27 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis)

Military spokesmen say their third phase strategy is to send soldiers into the mountainous southern part of Chechnya to find and destroy rebels, their strongholds and arms caches. Until now the primary strategy of the Russian troops has been to minimize direct contact with the "Chechen rebels," instead employing aerial and artillery bombardment to destroy rebel-controlled Chechen cities and villages, thus minimizing Russian losses. With the initiation of this third phase, the Russian troops must now come face-to-face with the rebels and casualty counts can be expected to rise sharply.

In the meantime, Russian troops say they have completed their encirclement of the capital and announced on 6 December an ultimatum to civilians to leave the city by 11 December or face destruction. Anyone remaining in the city after that date would be considered a terrorist and killed. Russian aircraft are dropping leaflets over the city announcing the ultimatum and identifying a security corridor out of the city allowing civilians to leave safely. After the deadline, the Russians will increase their unwavering assault against Djokhar with "more powerful,
cutting edge weapons and equipment." By some accounts these weapons will include incendiary munitions and fuel-air bombs which explode above ground but exert enough pressure to kill people below ground. (BBC WORLD NEWS, 6 Dec 99; via National Public Radio, and THE INDEPENDENT (London), 26 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis) There are an estimated 50,000 Chechens left in Djokhar.

Continuing casualty reporting
To convince the Russian public of the success of current Chechen operations, officials continue to portray Russian casualty counts as minimal. But as troops begin to come into more direct contact with "Chechen rebels" under the planned third phase, the casualty counts can be expected to climb. Already the numbers are growing as a result of fierce fighting last week following an announcement by Chechen field commander, Shamil Basaev, that his forces will begin a major counter-offensive. (INTERFAX, 1449 GMT, 26 Nov 99; via World News Connection) As the numbers are made public, more analysts are beginning to draw parallels with Russian casualties reported during the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, 1979-89. According to official figures, the Russian military is losing about 130 troops per month, a rate comparable to the monthly death toll of Soviet troops during the long, unsuccessful Afghanistan campaign. The current casualty counts are reported by Russian officials as anywhere between 279-462 dead and 756-1,485 wounded since August and include dead/wounded during operations in both Chechnya and Dagestan. (BOSTON GLOBE, 20 Nov 99; ITAR-TASS, 1500 GMT, 12 Nov 99; via World News Connection) Casualty figures for Chechen fighters, mainly coming out of Russian channels, are not considered to be reliable.

In one report, Russian military officials admitted 12 out of 14 paratroopers had been killed and two captured during a reconnaissance mission on 17 November. This number was the largest reported by Russian commanders from a single battle with the Chechens. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 29 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis) Coincidentally, a Chechen officer stated on 22 November that some 200
Russians were killed in an ambush of a reconnaissance patrol the week before and backed up this claim with a video showing at least 43 bodies in Russian uniforms. Ali Dudarov, the Ingush deputy interior minister, later supported reports of this incident and the casualty count based on his discussion with Russian officers. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2013 GMT, 22 Nov 99; via World News Connection; WASHINGTON POST, 3 Dec 99) Despite the conflicting information, the casualty figures reported by Russian officials are almost universally believed to be underestimated for political and propaganda reasons. For example, one method being used to skew the figures is to portray death totals as only those troops killed directly in combat and not those soldiers who die from their wounds later in hospital. The soldiers in the field are already nervous, complaining that they are fighting an "invisible enemy." One soldier says "It only seems like there is no one inside, but let anyone approach and the bullets come flying at us from every direction, from every ruin." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1502 GMT, 1 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

Show me the money
With the estimates of Chechen operations continuing at least until the end of the year and, more recently extended for possibly another three months, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced on 23 November that several billion rubles were to be transferred from the Federal Road Fund to the defense sector. The State Duma had agreed to this reallocation of a total of R5.5 billion from the road budget to the military in order to pay for operations in Chechnya. (ITAR-TASS, 1456 GMT, 23 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

And after the fat lady sings...
Nikolai Koshman, deputy prime minister and Russia's representative in Chechnya, announced on 12 November that a Russian division would be permanently based in Chechnya. This formation, according to Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, would consist of a combined forces division, probably stationed in the Chechen settlement of Chervlennaya, and a tank regiment at Shali. Also
included would be several units from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Justifications for this troop basing are the reported atrocities carried out by rebels against Chechen civilians and as assurance against the reemergence of "terrorist" activity. (ITAR-TASS, 1512 GMT, 27 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

Reports say the 106th Tula Airborne Division will represent the core of these permanently based forces. (VREMYA MN, 1 Dec 99; Defense and Security, via lexis-nexis)

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Sarah Miller

GUUAM waxes and the CIS wanes
Could the CIS be in worse shape? As one initiative after another is not implemented, and each summit succumbs to polarization, even the Russian leadership, which always praises its pet project, has little enthusiasm for the CIS. This "vitally important" organization, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin calls it, "didn't become an alliance" and is now "largely formal." (INTERFAX, 22 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis)

From the beginning, the CIS has been unable to see through its integration initiatives; since last summer, it has become increasingly polarized. Russia has always treated the CIS as its post-Soviet domain and now it is searching for a scapegoat as the CIS loses ground. Russia usually initiates most of the finger pointing against those that resist its leadership within the CIS and look elsewhere for new, viable partnerships. Putin has blamed "foreign" geopolitical meddling, while others have blamed GUUAM, the westward-leaning group of CIS states (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova).

According to the Russian media, the moribund state of the CIS was especially apparent just before the OSCE Istanbul summit. In the end, CIS polarization
precluded a common stance going into the summit. (KOMMERSANT, 27 Oct 99; Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press) This Customs Union versus GUUAM split has typified CIS relations since GUUAM members began to assert themselves within the CIS. Also, GUUAM's success at economic and strategic coordination has only irritated Russia. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 4 Aug 99) Even without a formal organizational structure, GUUAM members have shown solidarity not only in terms of the CIS, but also as an independent association of states. And despite their initial unwillingness to be perceived as a "military bloc," GUUAM rhetoric no longer hides behind its economic role. Instead, its rhetoric stresses its strategic and economic "consultative" role. (BBC, 22 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis) In practice, GUUAM is falling into its strategic cooperation role well; the group concluded several meetings over the past six months and scheduled a GUUAM foreign ministers meeting in Tbilisi for January 2000. (ITAR-TASS, 21 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis) GUUAM's shift in rhetoric and policy emphasis seems to indicate that it has matured over the past year and has begun to take a stronger stance within the region vis-a-vis Russia and the CIS.

Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE
Out in the cold
Because of Ukraine's inefficient power production and the country's massive debts to its gas-providing neighbors, many observers predicted that this winter would be an exceptionally difficult one for the country. They could not have predicted that the problems would begin so soon, however, thanks to the remnants of a cyclone that hit the country at the end of November.

By 23 November, snow and ice had begun falling on southern Ukrainian towns. By 24 November, almost 3,000 towns in the Dnipro area were completely without
power. Public transportation was stopped, the railroads were barely running, 13 local airports were closed and telephone service was almost completely shut down. The Ukrainian Ministry for Emergency Situations told ITAR-TASS that the regions of Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhya were hardest hit by the storm, with more than 11,000 electrical substations out of order. (ITAR-TASS, 25 and 26 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis)

Also according to the emergency situations ministry, 13,000 people worked to clear the roads in towns along the southern portion of the Dnipro River, as the storm finally began to clear on 26 November. Although there are no current reliable estimates of homes or towns still without power, the number is apparently substantial. And, although there are rumors that at least two people have died either as the result of electrocution from fallen wires or from falling trees, those rumors have not been confirmed. (ITAR-TASS, 0726 GMT, 25 Nov 99; via World News Connection)

This latest weather crisis has only added to the country's deepening energy problems. The country's five nuclear plants, which supply between 40-50 percent of Ukraine's energy, have been undergoing a rash of shutdowns, both planned and unplanned. The latest shutdown was due to a reactor malfunction and came on 2 December at the Chernobyl plant. That plant's one functioning reactor was only restarted on 26 November, following five months of routine, annual repair. It reached its maximum generating capacity on 29 November.

Officials said that the Chernobyl reactor suffered a malfunction in its emergency cooling system, but that no increase in radioactivity was registered. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2 Dec 99; via Russia Today) This emergency shutdown follows another at the Khmelnyskyy power station in October after a transmission line was damaged. (UNIAN, 1400 GMT, 18 Oct 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) The country was recently also forced to shut
down at least one reactor due to a lack of fresh fuel, and has taken a number of reactors off line for yearly upkeep.

Put this all together, and what you get are shortages, which can lead to tragedy. On 1 December, a patient in the western Lviv region apparently died during an operation when power went out during his surgery. In another hospital, doctors reportedly performed a recent Caesarean section by candlelight. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1 Dec 99; via Russia Today) And the West wonders why Ukraine needs Chernobyl's one reactor that produces just five percent of the country's electricity.

Out in the cold II
Today's riddle: What talks a lot, snubs the leader of the second biggest country on the European continent, insults two countries on two continents with one sentence, and discourages a newly independent state from instituting Western-style reforms in a single bound? The European Union's commissioner for enlargement, Guenter Verheugen, of course.

On 25 November, Verheugen responded to President Leonid Kuchma's oft-repeated request to be considered for a place in the European Union. "We are counting on a signal from the European Union that if we achieve the Copenhagen criteria (for EU accession), our state will be viewed as a future candidate for membership in the European Union," Kuchma told the Financial Times on 23 November. "Of course, ... we rely first and foremost on our own efforts. But, ... support of the European Union would hasten this process .... It is very important that the West listen to us," he said. Kuchma was hoping to be invited to the EU Helsinki summit to discuss the matter.

Apparently, Verheugen had different ideas. Not only was Kuchma not invited to the summit, even though the union is completing a new "Common Strategy on Ukraine," but his request was ridiculed. "I think it is irresponsible," Verheugen
said, "to talk about Ukraine and Russia as if they are potential candidates for membership. I think anybody who thinks Ukraine should be taken into the EU ... should perhaps come along with the argument that Mexico should be taken into the US." (REUTERS, 25 Nov 99; via Russia Today) Of course, Kuchma did not talk about Russia, and the US is a country, not a union of countries, but why quibble over semantics?

There has been no response from Leonid Kuchma to Verheugen's remarks. It cannot be helpful, however, to his ability to pass reform legislation or to fight leftist tendencies in the country. In his inaugural speech, Kuchma tied the need for faster reform to entry into the EU. "Confirming our European choice," he said, "we consider our entry into the EU to be our strategic goal. Requirements for future EU members coincide greatly with actions planned to be taken in this country." (FIRST PROGRAMME, 2000 GMT, 30 Nov 99, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) Without that carrot, will Ukrainians continue to support reform?

BELARUS

Much ado about nothing much

Well, they finally made it. The question is, what did they make? On 8 November, amid much pomp and circumstance in Moscow, Presidents Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Boris Yel'tsin signed the much ballyhooed, and much delayed, Union Treaty. There is only one problem -- the document contains little that was not already part of the outline for unity signed on 25 December 1998 by the presidents.

The Union Treaty speaks of both countries "moving toward ... unification of legislation, tax policies, customs and border controls," but makes only one concrete plan -- the establishment of a joint military doctrine. (UPI, 1239 EST, 8 Dec 99; via lexis-nexis, and INTERFAX, 1744 GMT, 7 Dec 99; via World News
Even this provision, however, simply follows up on nine previous military agreements signed earlier this year. (The NIS OBSERVED, 18 Oct 99)

In reality the treaty signed this week does little more than demonstrate what limited progress has actually been made toward forming the type of union originally outlined almost one year ago. On 25 December 1998, Interfax explained the original "unification plan" step by step, detailing what would happen almost immediately in the process. "In February, a special agreement should be signed that will regulate prices and tariffs on goods and services in transport, communications, energy and gas industries. Also in February, the pricing principles of the two countries should be standardized." In addition, a plan should be implemented "to secure the mutual convertibility of the two currencies. (INTERFAX, 1318 GMT, 25 Dec 98; via World News Connection, and THE NIS OBSERVED, 13 Jan 99)

Almost one year later, those goals seem more distant than ever. The "union" is still but a dream in Lukashenka's active mind. Russia, however, has made great strides in fulfilling what must have been a major, if not the only, goal in this union strategy -- its military control has been extended to Belarus' westernmost border. It cannot be a comforting thought in Ukraine, or in any of the western former Soviet republics. But, no doubt, for Russia, this small military victory must indeed be quite satisfying.

MOLDOVA
A win for the president -- and no one else
Thanks to the governmental crisis that he helped to precipitate, President Petru Lucinschi has now managed to make himself the most powerful man in Moldova and increase his likelihood of winning the upcoming presidential election. Unfortunately, he had to stand back while the cabinet fell, destroy the ruling non-Communist coalition, and nominate a prime ministerial candidate who had a limited chance of being confirmed in order to do it. Also unfortunately, the people
of Moldova will likely be the ones paying for the president's power play, as the government remains stagnant, and international organizations respond by freezing all loans to the country.

Over the last year, Lucinschi repeatedly attempted to increase his power -- at the expense of the prime minister and cabinet -- by changing Moldova's form of government to a presidential republic. At every turn, however, he was blocked by the parliament. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 15 Nov 99) Even worse, Ion Sturza, the Moldovan prime minister since February, was able to build a favorable reputation slowly both within and without Moldova, thus challenging Lucinschi's supremacy. Lucinschi began to solve these problems in November by allowing the Communist Party, in a coalition with the Popular Front and with the support of six "independent" pro-presidential deputies, to topple the government. He solidified his position by nominating Communist Party First Secretary Vladimir Voronin as the next prime minister. Almost immediately, it became clear that it would be difficult to acquire the necessary 52 votes to confirm Voronin -- a fact that Lucinschi must have known before Voronin was nominated. And, on 7 December, parliament indeed rejected Voronin's candidacy. Thus, the parliament has now refused to confirm two prime ministerial candidates, giving Lucinschi the right, under Moldova's constitution, to disband parliament and call for new elections.

Shortly after the vote, Lucinschi appeared "solemn," according to Reuters. (REUTERS, 7 Dec 99; via America Online) One day before the vote, his press secretary said, "The president believes an early election would be the most undesirable variant for the country at the moment." (INFOTAG, 1900 GMT, 6 Dec 99; via World News Connection) On that same day, however, Lucinschi explained that if parliament is not able to form a government, parliamentary elections would be necessary. Interfax noted that Lucinschi "stressed that his initiative to change the constitution with a view to strengthening presidential power was aimed at making the country more stable." (INTERFAX, 1222 GMT, 6
(Dec 99; via World News Connection) Of course, Lucinschi can, if he chooses, nominate a third candidate, but he has indicated that he does not wish to do so.

Lucinschi’s pieces have come together seamlessly. Unfortunately, the seams in Moldova’s economy and social welfare system are becoming more evident each day to the persons who live there. They have been without a government for a month and are suffering energy and food shortages. One would hope that Lucinschi is able to create a strategy to deal with these problems that will be as effective as his strategy for becoming the most powerful man in Moldova.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Miriam Lanskoy

CHECHNYA
Who in the world is Beslan Gantemirov?
The latest news reports from Chechnya indicate that the federal forces have taken control of Urus-Martan, a key Chechen stronghold, with the aid of militia leader Beslan Gantemirov, the new head of the State Council of Chechnya.

When he reemerged on the scene in early November, the nationalist Russian paper Segodnya relished the news: "The appearance in the theater of operations of Chechen patriots ready to clear their homeland from bandits and terrorists will beat the main propaganda card of the opponents of the 'anti-terrorist operation.' As is common knowledge, they view it as an aggression, whereas the coming of Gantemirov will give it the status of 'a liberation war.'" (SEGODNYA, 6 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis)

So who is this Chechen patriot whom the Russians have chosen to lead the new government of "liberated" Chechnya?
A former policeman turned black-marketer, Gantemirov made his debut on the political scene in 1991. Together with Yaragi Mamodaev, an oil man later accused of corruption, and Yusup Soslambekov, a convicted rapist, Gantemirov built up his "Islamic Path" party, actually a paramilitary group, eventually merging it into Djokhar Dudaev's National Guard. In Dudaev's government he was made mayor of Grozny. His tenure there was characterized by Western observers as an "epitome of mafia government." [CHECHNYA: CALAMITY IN THE CAUCASUS (New York: 1998)]

In 1993, when Dudaev attempted to curb the degree of corruption and theft, Gantemirov broke definitively with him and joined the opposition. By 1994, defeated by Dudaev, Gantemirov teamed up with the FSB and led several minor skirmishes against Dudaev's forces. The final infamous rout of his rebel band in November 1994 was the trigger that set the Russian invasion into motion. After Dudaev repelled that offensive, taking Russian tank crews prisoner in Grozny, Russian General Pavel Grachev made his over-eager promise to defeat Dudaev in two weeks. As far as the war went, Gantemirov was not heard from again.

He next resurfaced in Moscow in 1996 where he was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to six years on embezzlement charges, in connection with oil theft. In November 1999, Yel'tsin pardoned him, plucked him out of jail and sent him to "liberate" Chechnya.

Aside from being precisely the kind of "bandit" and "criminal" the Kremlin is supposedly fighting in Chechnya, Gantemirov seems to be allied with "wahhabis" to boot. Urus-Martan, whence he hails, was a center of radical Islamic agitation against President Maskhadov. In 1998 there were inconclusive clashes there between the locals and the Maskhadov loyalists. This week the Russian government apparently used Gantemirov's appeal with the Urus-Martan radicals to win the town from the Maskhadov fighters.
That the combined forces of the interior and defense ministries are not deemed sufficient to defeat roughly 6,000 Chechen fighters was apparent from the start, when the Russian side started using the newly formed Dagestani militias. Then Cossacks were brought into the fray. War might make for strange bedfellows, but isn’t an alliance with a convicted felon who draws his strength from the most radical elements in Chechen society going a bit too far?

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

KAZAKHSTAN
Kazakhstan wins financially, but loses politically after second rocket crash
On 18 November, nearly a month after a second Proton rocket crashed on Kazakh territory, the Russian government agreed to pay $400,000 in damages for any environmental destruction caused as a result of the crash. Although this is considerably more than Russia paid after the rocket collision last July, it came at a high price for the Kazakh government. During his 18 November meeting with his Russian counterpart in Astana, Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandr Pavlov ceded his country's right to ban any future launches to the Russian Aerospace Agency. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 22 Nov 99) As a result, Kazakhstan has lost significant leverage in the negotiations over the Baikonur lease agreement, thus far for few tangible returns. The Russian government has yet to pay a single installment of the five years' backrent owed for its use of the cosmodrome. Following last July's rocket crash, Kazakh negotiators were able to use the launch ban to force Russian officials to pledge that their administration would pay $50 million of the 1999 rent by the end of December, but none of these funds has reached Astana yet. Now that the Kazakh government can no longer use the threat of a launch ban to exact even the promise of payment, it seems unlikely that Russia will settle its debts regarding the Baikonur Cosmodrome in the near future.
Will Russian separatists' arrest in Kazakhstan raise inter-ethnic tensions?

Kazakh security ministry forces took 22 armed men into custody on 19 November, all of whom were charged with participating in a conspiracy to overthrow local authorities in Ust'-Kamenogorsk (in Kazakhstan's easternmost territory). The men allegedly planned to declare the city and its surrounding oblast' the "Independent Republic of Russian Altai." All of the men are ethnic Russians, but only 10 of them are Kazakh citizens; the rest hold Russian citizenship. It is believed that they were able to obtain backing from a number of influential local inhabitants. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 23 Nov 99) Five days after the men were detained, Nezavisimaya gazeta reported that the group's ringleader, Vladimir Kazimirchik, had spent the past two months attempting to rally support among the local population for his plan to secede from Kazakhstan. Oblast' security personnel repeatedly received warnings from local administrators regarding Kazimirchik's activities, but ignored them until the end of November. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 24 Nov 99)

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has made an effort to minimize the incident as much as possible, stating that he views the matter as a purely criminal case with no political overtones. He also told journalists that he does not expect the men's arrest to affect Kazakhstan's relations with the Russian Federation. President Nazarbaev's press secretary further assured the media that the country's Russian minority would not be subjected to increased security measures as a result of the incident. However, local security officials in Ust'-Kamenogorsk have reported that quite the opposite is taking place there. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 29 Nov 99)

It remains to be seen how Kazakhstan's population will react to this incident. For most of his tenure, President Nazarbaev has advocated a policy of coexistence between his country's still sizable Russian minority and its various Turkic groups; prior to the Soviet Union's collapse, Kazakhs were actually a minority in their own
republic, outnumbered by the Russians and other Slavic groups. Overall, Nazarbaev's policy appears to have been successful, but tensions still exist, particularly in areas where one group seems to enjoy marked economic advantages over the other. Many of Kazakhstan's industrial regions are still heavily populated by Russians, who consequently may be perceived as unfairly maintaining a monopoly on a large portion of the country's resources and profits. Ust'-Kamenogorsk is in a part of the country known for its mining industry. The appearance of a Russian secessionist movement there, which may have had the support of prominent local residents and perhaps even the backing of local security organs, could ignite the fear that much of northeastern Kazakhstan is in danger of breaking away. A number of politicians and other leading figures (e.g., Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn) in the Russian Federation have publicly advocated the return of northern Kazakhstan to its rightful owners, the Russians. At this point it seems doubtful that the Ust'-Kamenogorsk group had outside assistance from the likes of Zhirinovsky or Solzhenitsyn, but even a rumored connection may be sufficient to spark violent conflict.

UZBEKISTAN

Soviet-style political repression reported to be alive and well

According to Tolib Yaqubov, the general secretary of the Uzbek Human Rights Society, Soviet-style methods of torture and harassment are still commonly used by Uzbekistan's law enforcement authorities during the interrogation of detainees. In mid-November, Mr. Yaqubov traveled to Geneva, where he testified before a UN panel on human rights violations in Uzbekistan. He also delivered a written report to the UN Committee Against Torture in which he described typical methods used by the Uzbek police and interior ministry personnel. In an interview on Iranian radio shortly before he left for Geneva, Mr. Yaqubov explained that Uzbek law enforcement officials often resort to torture in order to obtain confessions from their prisoners. Convicts who violate prison rules are frequently subjected to physical abuse as well, as a form of punishment. (VOICE OF THE
In addition to relying on various methods of torture to intimidate and terrorize detainees, Uzbek authorities also continue to imitate the Soviet practice of situating prison camps in the most geographically inhospitable parts of the country. One such penal colony is located on the Ustyurt Plateau, near the town of Jaslyq in western Karakalpakstan in a region which the Soviet army once used for weapons testing. Radiation levels are abnormally high in the area surrounding the camp and, according to Mr. Yaqubov, at least 38 inmates of the Jaslyq camp have died so far this year. The Uzbek government has admitted to the camp's existence, and claims that 6471 people are incarcerated there; Mr. Yaqubov believes the number is closer to 15,000. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 1500 GMT, 31 Oct 99; via World News Connection)

Mr. Yaqubov's statements about the existence of the Jaslyq prison camp and its ecologically hazardous environment have been corroborated by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki researcher Cassandra Cavanaugh (TURKISTAN NEWSLETTER, 22 Oct 99) and Amnesty International has issued numerous reports describing the physical torment and other forms of harassment that suspected opposition members and their families have endured. The Uzbek government itself makes no secret of the fact that hundreds of people have been arrested on suspicion of their links to either the secular or Muslim opposition. Given all of this evidence, it seems absurd for Western leaders to continue speaking of Uzbekistan as a nascent democracy. Regardless of how often Uzbek administrative officials may reiterate their commitment to building a politically open society and protecting their citizens' civil rights, in fact, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan has become one of the most repressive dictatorships in the former Soviet Bloc.
Fortunately, Western leaders could easily exert pressure on the present Uzbek leadership to change its ways, if they so chose. Uzbekistan is currently dependent on international investment and aid programs to develop a viable economy and any threats which Western officials might make to curtail their financial assistance would surely not fall on deaf ears.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States
By Kate Martin

Interference in internal affairs? I'm shocked
With all the sincerity of a Casablanca police officer expressing outrage that gambling is occurring as he pockets his own illegal winnings, Russia has remonstrated against Baltic leaders' comments concerning the bombing campaign in Chechnya, claiming such statements constitute interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. During the OSCE summit in Istanbul, Baltic leaders such as Latvian Prime Minister Andris Skele and Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar called upon Russia to stop its offensive in Chechnya and seek a negotiated solution. Estonian President Lennart Meri stayed away from the summit to protest the OSCE's inefficiency and lack of resolve in dealing with the Chechen issue. At home, Lithuanian Seimas Speaker Vytautas Landsbergis decried the weakness of the summit's declaration concerning the war. "I got the impression that Chechnya had been abandoned for destruction, as Western leaders failed to come up with something more specific and more strict," he said. Estonia's Riigikogu passed a statement strongly condemning Russian actions with a vote of 57 to 1, and no abstentions. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE reports, 18-22 Nov 99)

The response from Russia has been one of supreme irritation. "Politicians are trying to teach us how we should manage our affairs in the Northern Caucasus...," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin said, branding
statements by leaders and parliamentarians as "impermissible interference in the interior affairs of Russia." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 23 Nov 99)

While Russian leaders protest the passage of parliamentary statements seeking an end to the attacks on Chechen civilians, they apparently have forgotten their own concerted efforts to influence discussions on state language laws in Latvia and Estonia this past year. Such attempts still have not ended: Recently, the Russian Duma adopted a bill on the imposition of economic sanctions against Latvia in response to the internal affairs of that Baltic country. The bill is the Russian lawmakers' response to the national language law which is due to be passed in the near future in Riga, according to Anatoly Chekhoev, vice chairman of the Duma's Committee for the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relations with Compatriots. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 16 Nov 99) Moreover, the Duma called on the international community to highlight "gross violations of the international law in Latvia," in a statement (passed with 258 votes against one) that criticizes the proposed language law, which is due to be discussed this week in the final reading. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 19 Nov 99)

Meanwhile, one of the leaders of the Russian Citizens Union in Estonia, Pyotr Rozhok, who is campaigning for a seat in the Russian Duma on the For the Soviet Union party ticket, outlined his election platform which would, in effect, seek to increase substantially Russian interference in the internal affairs of Estonia. Rozhok seeks to bring back to Estonia persons who were "forcibly expelled," return to Russians property which had been taken from them, and abolish boundaries, visas and taxes which are being collected on what he describes as ancient Russian property. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 15 Nov 99)

ESTONIA
**Court performance verdict: operating so as to endanger**

Justice Minister Mart Rask gave the country's court system a highly critical evaluation and warned that society could be imperiled in a letter he sent to Uno Lohmus, chairman of the State Court. At issue primarily is how long many cases take, since habitual delays undermine the court's authority, the minister said. He cited 926 civilian cases which last year were dragged over 12 months, while nearly one-fourth of all criminal cases took over six months to conclude. "If the administration of justice doesn't work, the society will find other, non-judicial ways for doing justice, in the form of a lynch law," Rask warned. A "notion is gaining ground among ordinary citizens that no protection can be expected from court," he added. Lohmus agreed with Rask's concerns, but warned that an investigation into the causes of these delays would determine whether bad organization, excessive workloads of judges, procedural norms or some other reason was responsible. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 10 Nov 99)

**LATVIA**

**Commission work yields no improvement in corruption perception**

Despite active attempts by the government to address the situation, a perception of extensive corruption remains in Latvia, according to a recent poll by the Latvian Center of Criminology Studies. The results indicate that 65.6 percent of persons responding said that corruption was widespread in the country, while 40 percent believed corruption to be exceedingly widespread. In fact, out of the 404 persons questioned, only one said corruption was very scarce in Latvia; none described corruption as scarce. Still, some level of optimism could be found: Nearly one-half of the respondents stated that corruption could be curbed to some degree, although less than 5 percent said the scourge could be eliminated entirely. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 4 Nov 99)

The fight against corruption has remained high on the government's agenda for years. A report prepared by EU experts found problems at all levels of the Latvian government. (OMRI DAILY DIGEST, 19 Dec 96) The following year,
Prime Minister Andris Skele announced that "The fighting of corruption has to become one of the main jobs of the state and all people responsible for the use of state funds must be aware that their activities will be scrutinized very closely." (REUTERS, 7 May 97; via Clari.Net) That effort had shown little evidence of success by last year, when a poll conducted by the international anti-corruption organization Transparency International (TI) indicated that businessmen, international experts and the public believed that Latvia had a high level of corruption in comparison to other countries. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1000 GMT, 23 Sep 98) Results of research by the World Bank a few months later indicated that the abuse of power was expanding. The authorities most affected by corruption are the customs and road traffic police, but the reason underlying the spreading corruption was seen to be the lack of adequate restrictions on the competence granted to public servants, the World Bank's research indicates. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 1024 GMT, 3 Dec 98; via World News Connection) Two months later, however, the World Bank praised Latvia's anti-corruption efforts.

Despite a perceived lack of progress in combating corruption, another poll indicates that the perception does not affect the willingness of a majority of Latvian residents to stay in their country. When asked, most residents said they would reject an offer to move permanently to some Western country. According to the poll conducted by the Sociali Korelativo Datu Sistemas (SKDS) research center, 59.1 percent of the population would rather remain in Latvia, 32 percent would accept the chance to relocate, and 8.8 percent were undecided. While there were some deviations depending on citizenship, more than half of both citizens and non-citizens would opt to stay. The center questioned 2,000 residents between the ages of 18 and 75 in October. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 15 Nov 99)