

NEWSFLASH # 20

Covering the period: 28 September - 10 October

In this issue:

▶[Belarus: European March 14 October 2007](#)

▶[Serbia/Kosovo: Kosovo Troika-talks continue](#)

▶[Georgia: Former defence minister detained in Georgia and retracts murder claims](#)

▶[Ukraine: Results parliamentary elections 30 September](#)

And much more news from:

NEW EU MEMBER STATES: [Bulgaria](#), [Romania](#)

ACCESSION / CANDIDATE COUNTRIES: [Croatia](#), [Macedonia](#), and [Turkey](#)

WESTERN BALKANS: [Albania](#), [Bosnia Herzegovina](#), [Montenegro](#) and [Serbia/Kosovo](#)

WIDER EUROPE / NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES: [Armenia](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Belarus](#), [Georgia](#), [Moldova](#), [Russia](#), and [Ukraine](#)

The Newsflash of the European Forum of Democracy and Solidarity is a bi-monthly news bulletin covering relevant political developments in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, and the South Caucasus. We put main accent on political party news, while at the same time attention is being given to gender issues, minority and human rights, and the process of accession to the European Union. It is sponsored by the British Labour Party through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and is spread by e-mail to more than 500 recipients. The Newsflash is based on mass media and internal sources. Contributions and comments are highly appreciated.

NEW EU MEMBER STATES

Bulgaria

▶*No progress reported in talks with Bulgaria's striking teachers*

The government and teachers' unions again failed to reach an agreement during weekend negotiations aimed at ending a strike that has closed schools for two weeks, local media reported on Monday 8 October. This time, the cabinet offered to cut teacher personnel by 25%, in order to guarantee the remaining teachers a raise of 32.25% next year, up from the last offer of 25%. The teachers are demanding a 100% raise. Their unions rejected personnel cuts, though they indicated they might drop demands for a hike in education spending.

▶*Bulgaria joins Europol*

Bulgaria became a member of the European Police Office (Europol) at a ceremony in The Hague on Wednesday 3 October. Last year, Bulgaria and Europol exchanged information on 780 occasions; that number has already doubled this year. Europol Director Max Peter Ratzel said Bulgaria has been submitting more and more essential and accurate information, making it a desired member of the agency.

Romania

▶*Former Romanian agriculture minister arrested in corruption probe*

Former Agriculture Minister Ioan Avram Muresan was detained for 24 hours on Sunday 7 October on charges that he offered a 15,500-euro bribe to a senior

official, reportedly on behalf of a businessman whose company was bidding in a municipal property tender. According to local press reports, that senior official is Agriculture Minister Decebal Traian Remes, who was minister of finance from 1998 to 2000. In an interview with Realitatea TV, Remes denied the accusations.

► *Romanian Parliament rejects Social Democrats' censure motion with 220 MPs voting to back it*

The censure motion filed by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) was rejected by Parliament on Wednesday 3 October, with 220 MPs voting to back it. The censure motion needed 232 votes in order to pass. After being tabled in Parliament on 24 September, the much-touted motion of censure was read out on 27 September by PSD Spokesman Cristian Diaconescu at a plenary sitting of Parliament. The motion called '1,000 days of chaos - the end of the right-wing government' and signed by 139 MPs, was read out in the presence of Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu and some members of his Cabinet.

Mircea Geoana, the Social Democrat leader, on 4 October summoned the Permanent National Bureau in order to debate the failure of the censure motion filed against the 2nd Tariceanu Government. The Social Democrats were not content to simply analyse the reasons that led to the failure of the motion, but went ahead and sanctioned Social Democrat MPs that voted against the document. In fact, on the evening of 3 October Mircea Geoana had announced that the MPs would be sanctioned as per the party's statute by the local party organisations of which they are members, provided their lack of loyalty would be proven. Party sources claim that it is possible that in the next days the Social Democrat leaders would study the video footage recorded during the voting session, in order to identify and punish the ones that strayed from the party line.

ACCESSION / CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

Croatia

► *Parliamentary election in Croatia to be held on November 25*

Croatia's President and Prime Minister Stjepan Mesic and Ivo Sanader agreed that the country's parliamentary election would be held on 25 November, it was reported on 8 October. The election date will be officially fixed on 17 October. On Friday, 12 October, the parliament will be dissolved. The election campaign will start on 3 November and will last three weeks.

► *Croatia denies it is pressuring Hague tribunal on "Vukovar Three" verdict*
Government spokesman Ratko Macek rejected claims on Sunday 7 October that Croatia is pressuring The Hague war crimes tribunal over the verdict returned last week in the so-called "Vukovar Three" trial. Tribunal President Fausto Pocar reportedly has sent a letter that will be distributed to all UN members, complaining that Croatia is pressuring the court and is trying to influence its independence. Croatia rejected the sentences handed down as too lenient.

In other news Sunday, Croatian Justice Minister Ana Lovrin said that Zagreb will ask Russia to extradite former Yugoslav People's Army General and Defence Minister Veljko Kadijevic. He is charged with committing war crimes in Vukovar between 1991 and 1995.

► *NATO Assembly in favour of Croatia*

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Committee for Defense and Security adopted in Reykjavik a draft resolution calling on the NATO member states to send a membership invitation to Croatia, Albania and Macedonia at the summit to be held next spring in Bucharest, it was reported on 7 October.

Macedonia

► *Swedish Embassy personnel, KFOR soldiers accused of smuggling people into Macedonia*

Authorities say Swedish Embassy and KFOR personnel were involved in a scheme to smuggle out five residents of Kosovo, it was reported on 9 October. The five were allegedly driven across the border in jeeps used by the Swedish contingent in KFOR on Saturday 6 October. They allegedly had passports issued illegally by the Swedish Embassy in Skopje. Plans to board a flight to Stockholm were thwarted when border police officials noticed they lacked stamps proving they entered Macedonia. Officials say they entered the country through an auxiliary border check point in Blace, regularly used by KFOR.

► *Solana: "Macedonia progresses"*

"Macedonia is on the right track, which I believe will not be derailed by recent incidents in the Parliament, EU foreign", security policy chief Javier Solana said on 3 October in Brussels after meeting President Branko Crvenkovski. All those involved should be called to account for the shortest possible period, Solana said. "We have agreed that progress has been made in numerous areas. Naturally, there are spheres that require additional efforts in the upcoming period in order to achieve more serious results and come closer to our goal - to start the EU entry talks in the course of 2008", Crvenkovski said.

In other news, President Branko Crvenkovski met with EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn in Brussels on 3 October. The president informed Rehn about the spheres in which Macedonia has made progress this year, stressing the improved business climate, the successful fight against corruption, and the foreign investors' increased interest. Crvenkovski stressed that Macedonia is still determined to receive a date for start of the negotiations for membership in year 2008, underlining that everyone is prepared to work on fulfilling the necessary criteria. EU Commissioner Rehn noted that the decision on whether the European Union should start negotiations for membership with Macedonia would depend on the results from the reforms in the public prosecution, the public administration, and the fight against corruption.

► *Macedonia's main opposition group demands interior minister's resignation*

The main opposition group, the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia, demanded on 30 September the resignation Sunday 30 September of Interior Minister Gordana Jankulovska over her handling of an incident last week in which a TV Alsat cameraman was beaten by police. He had been taping the police as they stopped a vehicle containing two Democratic Union of Macedonia (DUI) members of parliament. The car with the MPs was allowed to go, but the police attacked the journalist and broke his camera. DUI says no charges have been filed against the police, despite Jankulovska's assurances to the contrary.

Turkey

► *Turkey condemns US Armenia vote*

Turkey has denounced a vote by a US congressional committee recognising as genocide the 1915-17 mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks. President Abdullah Gül said the decision was unacceptable and had no validity for Turkey, which has always denied any genocide took place. The White House fears Turkey could now limit co-operation in the war on terror and provision of military bases near Iraq.

► *Mourning Turkey on alert against PKK*

Turkey started urgent discussions on taking "strong measures" to address the problem of terrorism as soon as possible after the PKK killed 15 troops on Sunday 7 October. The attack has led opposition parties to charge the government with inefficiency and even with inciting terror. Leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), Deniz Baykal, said the ruling Justice and

Development (AKP) government had no political will to fight terror.

► *Women condemn Turkey constitution*

On 2 October women's groups in Turkey have condemned a new draft constitution, saying it sets the country back years in terms of gender equality. A new constitution is being prepared to replace the current one, introduced after the military coup of 1980. The document describes women as a vulnerable group needing protection. The current constitution in Turkey obliges the government to ensure equality for all - a clause that women's groups fought hard to include.

► *CHP women's voice condemns 'cruelty' against party members*

Güldal Okuducu, leader of the women branches of Republican People Party (CHP), charged the party's top echelon with nominating directors to province and district administrations by excluding local administrations, in a violation of party statute. Okuducu left the central executive board (MYK) meeting Wednesday 26 September, accusing the party executives of purging party cadres without good reason.

WESTERN BALKANS

► *EU to relax visa restrictions for five SEE countries*

The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee approved a visa facilitation agreement on Wednesday 3 October with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. The accord will significantly relieve visa issuance procedures for certain categories of citizens, such as businessmen, journalists, academics, students, members of official delegations as well as family members and relatives of citizens who are legal residents in EU countries. The document is expected to come into force in January 2008.

Albania

► *EU praises Albania's progress, says much work ahead*

European Education, Training, Culture and Youth Commissioner Jan Figel wrapped up a two-day visit to Tirana on Tuesday 2 October. He said Albania has made progress on its road to the EU, but that much remains to be done. "It is up to Albania to do its fundamental homework as it is your own country and we can only support you all the way," Figel said. He added that Albania is closer to the EU than it was even a year or two ago, as evidenced by the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA).

Meanwhile, the leader of Albania's Socialist Party, Edi Rama, headed to Brussels on 2 October in a bid to boost prospects for the ratification of the SAA, which was signed in June 2006 but has yet to be ratified by several EU members. Rama will hold talks with European Parliament officials and international experts on public policies.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

► *Hague tribunal president expected to offer positive assessment of co-operation shown by Serbia, BiH*

The president of the UN war crimes tribunal at The Hague, Fausto Pocar, is expected to give a positive assessment of the level of co-operation shown by both and Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Leaked portions of an annual report he plans to deliver to the UN Security Council next week appeared in the local media on Monday 8 October. They indicate Pocar will note considerable improvement in relations between Serbia and the tribunal after the formation of the new Serbian government in March. Two war crimes inductees have since been arrested.

► *Over 1 million people return to BiH since Dayton Accord signed*

New figures published on Sunday 7 October suggest an estimated 1.02 million displaced people and refugees have returned to BiH since the Dayton Peace Accord was signed in December 1995. According to data from the Federation of BiH's (FBiH) Ministry of Refugees and Displaced Persons, 740,878 people returned to FBiH; 258,029 to Republika Srpska; and 21,382 to Brcko District.

►*Two key parties in BiH reject Dodik-Silajdzic accord on police reform*
Leaders of the second largest Bosniak party, the Party of Democratic Action, and of the main Croatian party, the Croatian Democratic Union BiH, rejected the police-reform agreement signed last week by Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik and BiH Bosniak presidency member Haris Silajdzic, reports said on 3 October. Sulejman Tihic and Dragan Covic met on 2 October to discuss the draft. They told reporters that neither the content of the document nor the way it was presented to the public and to other parliamentary parties was acceptable. The two politicians also reiterated their support for the proposal tabled by High Representative Miroslav Lajcak.

BiH's top Serb and Muslim politicians reached a last-minute agreement on Friday 28 September to carry out a reform of the country's divided police forces. The EU had set the end of September as a deadline for completing the talks, and refused to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with BiH until the deal was finalised.

►*Republika Srpska President Jelic dies*
Srpska (RS) President Milan Jelic suffered a heart attack while watching a football match in his home town of Modrica and died on Sunday 30 September at a hospital. He was 51. A former football player himself, Jelic had undergone bypass surgery in 2003, according to his brother. The RS government has declared three days of national mourning in honour of the president, who took office almost a year ago. A member of the ruling Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), he had served in the RS cabinet before that. Still unclear is who will succeed him as president. Some suggest it could be former RS President Dragan Cavic of the Serb Democratic Party.

The Republika Srpska (RS) parliament approved the appointment Monday 1 October of Parliament Speaker Igor Radojcic as interim president following the sudden death of President Milan Jelic. Radojcic is a member of the ruling Party of Independent Social Democrats. The government also decided that new elections for entity president will be organised in three months.

►*Dodik re-elected as leader SNSD*
In other news on 30 September, the SNSD re-elected Milorad Dodik as its leader. Dodik received the unanimous support of all 700 delegates at a party congress. He reiterated that the RS government has not been blocking reforms in the past year, and insisted the entity is only trying to protect itself from attempts to change BiH's constitutional order.

Montenegro

►*EU to question Montenegro's use of euro*
As Montenegro prepares to sign a pact on closer links with the EU, the bloc's finance ministers meeting on 8 October are set to warn that the country's use of the euro as its national currency is not in line with EU rules. "Unilateral 'euroisation' is not compatible with the treaty, which foresees the eventual adoption of the euro as the endpoint of a structured convergence process within a multilateral framework," says a draft statement to be adopted on Tuesday 9 October, according to the Financial Times. The ex-Yugoslav country of over 620,000 inhabitants adopted the euro in 2002, switching from the German mark that it had been using since 2000. By contrast, Serbia uses the Dinar. The two states were part of a federation until June 2006 when Montenegro declared independence and set off on a separate path to EU membership.

► *Montenegrin ruling parties, opposition wrap up negotiations on new constitution*

The ruling parties and the opposition in Montenegro concluded negotiations Friday 5 October on the country's new constitution. The opposition is expected to announce its final position shortly. In part, the parties agreed that the official language will be Montenegrin, while Serbian, Bosniak, Albanian and Croatian will be acceptable in official use. The constitution will also specify that anyone with dual citizenship as of 3 June 2006 -- the day Montenegro declared independence from its union with Serbia -- will retain their citizenship.

► *Council of Europe urges Montenegro to accept recommendations on new draft constitution*

The president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Rene Van Der Linden, urged Montenegro on Monday 1 October to demonstrate its European commitment by accepting recommendations the Council of Europe had made about a new constitution. Meeting with Montenegrin President Filip Vujanovic in Strasbourg, Van Der Linden said that the organisation was keeping a close eye on the constitutional debate in Montenegro. Vujanovic, meanwhile, said Montenegro is committed to becoming a responsible and active member of European institutions.

Serbia/Kosovo

► *Kosovo Troika-talks continue*

The Kosovo status-talks between Serbia and Kosovo, supervised by an international troika of the European Union, Russia and the United States, on whether the province should be granted "supervised independence" are due to end on December 10. The talks have, so far, not resulted in a solution for the status of Kosovo. Several actors have commented on the talks, of which a selection can be found below.

KFOR :

The final decision on the Kosovo status will not be made in December, but most likely in mid-January, said KFOR Commander, French General Xavier Bout de Mamhac, on 10 October

Kosovo Prime Minister Ceku:

Kosovo will declare independence from Serbia within days of the December 10th deadline if no deal on its final status is in place by then.

Russia:

A unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo was "unacceptable" and direct talks between Serbia and Albanian separatists could be extended beyond the 10 December.

US:

It is unlikely that the Kosovo issue can be resolved this year, said Frank Wisner, the US participant in the Contact Group's Troika, on 4 October. "There is simply not enough time", he said in an interview.

UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon:

The UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon warns in his report that the apparently peaceful situation in Kosovo is only skin deep, it was reported on 2 October. In his assessment, even though the security situation in Kosovo seems calm on the surface, there is potential for an escalation of violence, mostly because Kosovo Albanians are dissatisfied that the status process has been stalled.

Council of Europe:

Kosovo's future status must be resolved in the United Nations as issues of state borders require a UN decision. Council of Europe's Secretary-General Terry Davis said this on 2 October, spelling out the official position of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE).

► *Alimpic appointed new mayor of Belgrade*

The Belgrade City Assembly appointed Zoran Alimpic as new chairman of the city council and new mayor of Belgrade on Monday 8 October, succeeding Nenad Bogdanovic, who died of cancer last month. Alimpic will serve until new local elections are called, probably by the end of the year.

► *EU, Serbia set to initial SAA by October-end*

Serbia hopes that the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union will be installed by the end of October, Serbian media said on 8 October. The same sources say the EU foreign ministers, who are to meet within a week, are expected to give a green light to initialing of the SAA, even though The Hague Tribunal's chief prosecutors Carla De Ponte told the foreign ministers that she was not fully pleased with Belgrade's cooperation with the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Although Serbian authorities hope that the agreement will be signed by the end of the year, sources in Brussels clarified that it might take extra to wrap up the technical preparations and the necessary paperwork.

WIDER EUROPE / NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES

Armenia

► *Council of Europe commissioner: 'There are people in prison who shouldn't be there'*

The visiting Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights admitted on Wednesday 10 October that "there are people in prison who shouldn't be there for various reasons" in Armenia. Thomas Hammarberg, who has been on a five-day fact-finding mission in Armenia since Sunday 7 October, is due to submit a summary report on the human rights situation in the country to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers early next year.

Azerbaijan

► *Azerbaijan: Islamist trial sets stage for confrontation with Tehran*

Sixteen men are on trial in Baku for allegedly receiving support from Iran with the aim of imposing Islamic rule in largely secular Azerbaijan. The trial, which began 8 October, has put Azerbaijan in the uncomfortable position of accusing Iran of meddling in its domestic affairs. Said Dadasbeyli stands accused of leading a group called the Northern Mahdi Army that, with extensive Iranian funding and training, sought to overthrow the state and impose Islamic Shari'a law on Azerbaijan. Dadashbeyli, who has pleaded not guilty to the charges, is considered to be a cleric with rising influence in Azerbaijan.

► *Azerbaijan urged to release imprisoned journalist*

Reporters Without Borders is calling on Azerbaijan to order the release of a journalist jailed after writing about gas and electricity problems on 26 September. Hakim Eldostu Mehdiyev, from the opposition "Yeni Musavat" newspaper, was arrested on 23 September and sentenced to 15 days in prison for resisting arrest after reporting about energy problems in the autonomous republic of Nakhichevan. The group also called on the National Security Ministry to put a stop to what it said was the harassment of Mehdiyev's family.

Also Amnesty International commented on the case, stating that they are "deeply concerned about allegations concerning the recent seizure, beating and imprisonment by police of opposition journalist Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev, and the subsequent persecution of his relatives, in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan in Azerbaijan. Amnesty International calls for the immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into these alleged human rights violations, and for the victims to receive appropriate reparations."

Belarus

► *European March 14 October 2007*

On 14 March 2007, the European March will be held in Minsk. The goal of the European March is to demonstrate the European choice of the Belarusian people. This civil society's initiative has acquired the extensive support of the leading political democratic parties, political movements, non-governmental and youth organizations, civil campaigns and well-known figures in Belarus.

The organisation has, so far, suffered from a huge amount of resistance by the Belarusian authorities. Though the fact that the organisation has a permit to protest, still many organisers of the European March have been arrested in the last few months. Also on 14 October, a special event will be held in Brussels. This event has the objective to pay attention to the current political situation in Belarus and to the European March that same day.

Below you can find a selection of the news between 28 September and 10 October 2007, concerning the European March:

► *European March applicant Yauhen Afnahel arrested*

The European March applicant, activist of the civil campaign "Jeans - For Freedom" Yauhen Afnahel was sentenced to 10 days of arrest by Minsk Central Court on 8 October. This information was confirmed to Charter'97 site by the staff of the remand jail in Akrestin Street, where the oppositionist was put on 8 October. As it became known to Charter'97 site Yauhen Afnahel was under observation since he left The Minsk City Executive Committee where he participated in the negotiations with the city authorities on holding the European March. The oppositionist was meanly caught by the militiamen on fabricated charges. The trial of the applicant of the European March was closed, without a lawyer.

► *Chairman of EP Delegation for relations with Belarus urges to stop repressions before the European March*

On 3 October it was reported that Bogdan Klich, Chairman of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Belarus welcomed the organising of the European March in Minsk and called the Belarusian authorities to stop the repressions against the oppositional activists on the European March's eve.

"I am dismayed by the reports of detentions, intimidation and harassment against the organisers of the European March to be held in Minsk on 14 October 2007. I call on the Belarusian authorities to stop these repressive actions and to allow Belarusian citizens, activists of the democratic opposition and representatives of the civil society to organize and to take part in this peaceful and open event", - Bogdan Klich said.

Other news Belarus

► *Social Democrats apply for permission to demonstrate in Minsk on anniversary on Kazulin's hunger strike*

Social Democrats have filed applications with the Minsk government for permission to field a number of pickets on 24 October to demand the release of their jailed leader Alyaksandr Kazulin, it was reported on 9 October. Members of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" and an unregistered group named "Young Social Democrats/Young Hramada" have timed the demonstration to coincide with the first anniversary of the beginning of Dr. Kazulin's hunger strike.

► *Supreme Court starts hearing justice ministry's closure suit against Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya"*

The Supreme Court of Belarus on 9 October started hearing the justice ministry's suit to liquidate the Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya." In its bill filed in early September, the ministry charged that the party

"persistently violates regulations currently in force, ignores requirements of the registering authority and has already received a written warning this year." At the beginning of the hearing, Nadzeya leader Alena Yaskova put forward a counter-suit against the justice ministry, accusing it of obstructing the legal activities of the party.

► *Malady Front founder says that authorities will not allow the group to operate legally*

Pavel Sevyarynets, a politician who was among the founders of Malady Front, said that the Belarusian authorities would not allow the opposition youth group to operate legally. The Supreme Court upheld the justice ministry's registration denial to Malady Front on 8 October. "Denying registration to a non-governmental organisation on the grounds that its founders were prosecuted for acting on behalf of an unregistered organisation in the past is absurd," he said in an interview. "It's absolutely clear after this decision that it is nothing but politically motivated."

► *Sentence to Klimau left without changes*

The Minsk city court left the sentence to Klimau (one of the oppositional leaders) without changes, it was reported on 2 October. The trial took place behind closed doors: journalists and human rights activist were not allowed in the court room. Andrei Klimau was sentenced to 2 years of prison of strict regimen for publication of the article in internet. Klimau was accused of calling for overthrowing the authorities. Previously Klimau, active opponent to Lukashenka, spent 4 years in prison on charges of economic crimes and then he was sentenced to 15 months of hard labour for organising the street action on Freedom Day in 2005. Amnesty International regards Andrei Klimau as prisoner of conscience.

► *Party leaders broke through to "parliament"*

The leaders of the United Civil Party, the Party of Communist Belarusian and the Belarusian Socio-Democratic Party (Hramada) - Anatol Liabedzka, Siarhei Kaliakin and Anatol Liaukovich - managed to enter the building of the "house of representatives" of the "national assembly" and hand in the signatures against the cancelling of privileges for different categories of people. The law was initiated in late May 2007 and is to come into force after 17 December, it was reported on 2 October. Together with the representatives of 40 election districts they came to the parliament building on Independence Square, where 2 October the autumn session of the lower house began in order to hand in the signatures to the "deputies".

Georgia

► *Georgia: government takes aim at media tycoon*

Government officials are attacking media tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili for his supposed role in a plot against President Mikheil Saakashvili and his administration. On 10 October key members of the governing National Movement Party and one government minister have accused Patarkatsishvili of "plotting intrigues" after Irakli Okruashvili recanted earlier allegations that the president was planning to "get rid of" the influential businessman. Patarkatsishvili has denied the government's accusations, claiming that he and Okruashvili were not "close friends," although they had occasionally met over the past few months.

► *Former defence minister detained in Georgia and retracts murder claims*

On Monday 8 October Irakli Okruashvili, a former prominent member of President Mikheil Saakashvili's administration, recanted his accusations that Saakashvili ordered the murder of a political opponent in a videotaped confession broadcast on national television. Visibly distressed and sinking into long pauses, Okruashvili denied each of the televised accusations he levelled against the Georgian president on 25 September and said that he had made them to generate political capital. Deputy Prosecutor-General Nika Gvaramia announced that Okruashvili, who spent 10 days in pre-trial

detention, had agreed to cooperate with the investigation and is due to be released pending payment of bail amounting to some \$5.6 million. Okruashvili's lawyer, Eka Beselia, said she was not allowed to be present during her client's interrogation, and claims his confession was made under pressure. At the interview Okruashvili was represented by a government-appointed lawyer.

Okruashvili was detained by security forces in Georgia on 27 September just two days after he launched a verbal attack on the president. Okruashvili accused Saakashvili of ordering killings and establishing authoritarian rule. He was detained on charges of extortion, money laundering and abuse of office while Georgia's defence minister. He had also launched an opposition Movement for a United Georgia.

► *United opposition took decision to establish "National Movement"*

Koba Davitashvili, the leader of "People's Party", told journalists that all political parties are welcomed to become member of a new opposition movement: "National Movement". Igor Giorgadze, ex Minister of Security, and Irina Sarishvili, the leader of the party "Imedi" are not welcomed. "National Movement" plans to visit different regions of Georgia and hold meetings with local population in order to dismantle Saakashvili's regime peacefully.

Moldova

► *Council of the European Union approves easing of visa regime for Moldovans*

The Moldovan citizens will enjoy a number of concessions when applying for visas to the EU member states, it was reported on 10 October. The Council of the European Union approved the decision regarding the signing of the agreements on visa facilitation and readmission. The visa facilitation agreement will include a set of benefits for the Moldovans traveling to the EU member states such as the maintenance of the tax of 35 euros, in contrast to the tax of 60 euros for other states, and issuance of free visas to a significant number of Moldovans, especially children, students, young people aged under 18, representatives of the civil society, journalists, businesspeople, sportsmen, artists, transporters, pensioners etc.

Russia

► *Russia bars opposition group from vote*

Russian electoral officials have barred a vocal opposition alliance from participating in December parliamentary elections, a spokeswoman for the group said on 10 October. As expected, the Central Election Commission declined to register a candidate list submitted by Other Russia which is co-led by former world chess champion Garry Kasparov, spokeswoman Lyudmila Mamina said. The group - which unites liberals, leftists and nationalists opposed to President Vladimir Putin's policies - had submitted papers last week in what Kasparov acknowledged was a quixotic effort meant mainly to draw attention to the tight Kremlin control over Russian politics.

► *Putin names new Russian spy chief*

On 6 October it was reported that Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, has named his former prime minister as the new head of Russia's foreign intelligence agency. Putin announced he had chosen Mikhail Fradkov for the post, while attending a summit of leaders from ex-Soviet republics in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe. Fradkov served as prime minister under Putin for more than three years until he and his government stepped down last month ahead of upcoming elections.

► *Russia: Putin 'unifies' a party system on life support*

President Vladimir Putin's surprise announcement this week that he will head the pro-Kremlin Unified Russia party's list of candidates for the 2 December Duma elections sent shockwaves throughout the political system, reports say

on 4 October. Although the president has been closely associated with the party since it was created, he has -- until now -- rejected a direct correlation.

The most common interpretation of Putin's move sees it as part of his presumed plan to remain personally in power after the March 2008 election. Tying his fortune to the party could, analysts note, open up for him opportunities to carve out powerful positions -- that aren't term limited -- as prime minister, speaker of the Duma, or head of Unified Russia. With Putin leading the charge, the party will almost certainly get a solid constitutional majority in the new legislature, allowing it to pass any number of revisions to the law on government or even the constitution.

But pursuing this agenda also seems likely to scuttle the Putin administration's efforts to develop at least the appearance of a two-party pluralist political system. The key to the half-hearted effort so far has been the creation and nurturing of the A Just Russia party, a left-leaning coalition led by long-time Putin ally and Federation Council Chairman Sergei Mironov.

► *Activists say EU-Russia rights dialogue at 'Dead End'*

Representatives of leading Russian civil society groups are expressing their frustration with what they say is a complete lack of progress in the EU's human-rights dialogue with Russia, it was reported on 4 October. The 11 civil-society leaders told the European Parliament's human rights committee in Brussels on 2 October that the bloc's efforts to engage Russian authorities in a meaningful rights dialogue have failed. Speaking for the group, Lev Ponomarev, chairman of the For Human Rights activist group, said Russian authorities ignore the views of civil society in the country, and take no action after meetings with the EU.

► **Gorbachev creates Social Democratic movement**

On 27 September it was reported that former leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev is currently working on the creation of a Social Democratic movement. Gorbachev intentionally doesn't want to create a new Social Democratic party. The new movement has the objective to unite the different activists: social democratic organisations, social democratic parties and social democratic supporters. Among the supporters of the initiative are: Gavriil Popov (ex-major of Moscow), Vyacheslav Igrunov (leader of SLON party), some regional organisations of SDPR and the RSDUY. The new movement will have its first congress on 20 October.

Ukraine

► *Ukraine settles Russian gas row*

Ukraine has settled a commercial dispute with Russian gas firm Gazprom, averting the risk of having its most important supply of energy cut off. The Russian firm had threatened to stop supplying its neighbour unless a \$1.3bn (£650m) bill was paid this month. But the two parties said they had reached a solution and would conclude an official agreement on Tuesday 9 October. Previous disputes between the two have seen gas supplies to Ukraine stopped, with a knock-on effect across Europe.

► *OU-PSD and BYuT confirm their invitation to Lytvyn's Bloc*

Our Ukraine - People's Self-Defense Bloc leader Yuri Lutsenko confirms the readiness of OU-PSD and BYuT to invite the Lytvyn's Bloc to take part in forming the coalition. He said this to journalists on 8 October, after a meeting with President of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko and leaders of parties, which entered the parliament. Yuri Lutsenko noted that the Bloc of Lytvyn received a proposal on forming the coalition, and presently "the ball is on his field". According to Lutsenko, all questions must be addressed to Bloc's leader Volodymyr Lytvyn. The OU-PSD leader also informed that his political force and BYuT have not only theoretical, but also practical opportunity to

form a coalition in the parliament.

► *Yushchenko urges that constitutional referendum be carried out*
President of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko insists on the necessity of carrying out an all-Ukrainian referendum on introducing amendments into the Constitution to determine the form of government (more power to parliament or not), it was reported on 8 October. According to an UNIAN correspondent, the President said this, speaking at the ceremony of presenting state awards on occasion of the Lawyer Day. "As for the questions concerning bases and contents of the Constitution, or its key principles, without any doubt, let us appeal to people and look for their support", Victor Yushchenko said. In the opinion of the President, namely the Ukrainian society must decide in which kind of state it wants to live.

► *Yanukovych claims that Party of Regions, as winner, has right to form coalition*
"We should form parliamentary coalition and government as soon as possible. This is a top priority task, the society expects it," Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych noted at the meeting with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Ukraine William Taylor, according to the government's press-office on 4 October. "Nothing unexpected has happened. As we have expected, knowing the people's mood, the Party of Regions has gained a victory, - Viktor Yanukovych said commenting the parliamentary election outcomes. - It means that the winner party, according to democratic principles, has the right to form a coalition."

► *Only two complaints from subjects of elections submitted to courts*
Supreme Administrative Court of Ukraine chief Oleksander Paseniuk claims that, as of 3 October, only two complaints from subjects of the electoral process have been submitted to district administrative courts. Paseniuk stressed that, in line with the legislation, at the current stage of the electoral process, complaints are submitted to district administrative courts. "According to the official information, there are two such complaints", he said. He could not specify which exactly political forces submitted the complaints.

► *Results parliamentary elections 30 September*
The Ukrainian parliamentary elections of 30 September resulted in the following composition of the Ukrainian parliament (total 450 seats): Party of Regions 175, Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc 156, Our Ukraine - People's Self Defense Bloc 72, Communists Party of Ukraine 27, Lytvyn's People Bloc 20, Socialist Party of Ukraine 0. The Socialist Party of Ukraine did not make the electoral threshold of 3% of the voters; the party won 2,86%.

The international observer-mission (PACE, OSCE, NATO and others) stated that "The campaign was conducted in a calm atmosphere, with only isolated incidents and a diverse media environment provided for broad coverage of the campaign. Also, election day was calm, and overall, voting was conducted in an orderly and transparent manner."

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