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News Bulletin

November 26, 2002, Tuesday

LENGTH: 403 words

HEADLINE: Georgia demands additional environmental safety guarantees for oil pipeline

DATELINE: TBILISI. Nov 26 (Interfax)

BODY:

The Georgian authorities continue to insist on additional guarantees for the environmental safety of the **Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan** main export pipeline from the investors.

This was stated at a Monday evening news conference in Tbilisi held by U.S. envoy on Caspian energy matters Steven Mann and president of the Georgian International Oil Corporation (GIOC) Georgy Chanturia. The news conference took place immediately after their conversation with Georgian President **Eduard Shevardnadze**.

Mann told reporters he had come to Tbilisi specifically to see on site the problems arising in connection with the pipeline's construction. He said the stance of the U.S. government is that the project is conducted at the highest level from the viewpoint of possible impact on the natural and social environment.

Mann was confident that the pipeline crossing Borjomi gorge, which is rich in mineral springs, will be absolutely safe both during construction and operation. In this connection, he voiced hopes that the construction of the Georgian section of the pipeline would begin soon.

He hoped that experts would settle controversial questions by the end of November. By implementing this project, Georgia will prove that it has developed a solid investment environment and is ready to accept a new wave of foreign investments, Mann said.

Meanwhile, French and Dutch experts have concluded that the construction of the pipeline across Borjomi gorge may tilt the environmental balance in that unique area. Several Georgian non-governmental organizations, including the Green Party, have demanded a change in the pipeline route.

The project operator- British Petroleum- and other parties to the international consortium BTC, and also GIOC, do not agree with this assessment. Their experts claim the pipeline will circumvent all risk zones. In addition, every precaution will be taken for the safe functioning of the pipeline.

By November 30, the Georgian Environmental Protection Ministry should define its stance and decide on the issue of a permit for the construction of the pipeline in the country.

Pipe laying in Azerbaijan and Georgia should begin in the first quarter of 2003, and end at the end of 2004.

The 1,740-kilometer pipeline with an annual throughput capacity of 50 million tonnes is estimated to cost \$ 2.95 billion and should be commissioned in 2005.

LOAD-DATE: November 27, 2002
