



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. Friday, January 12, 2007

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**#1**

**U.S. Rep. Alcee L. Hastings Appointed Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
Office of Rep. Hastings, January 11, 2007**

Washington, DC -- Today, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi appointed Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Florida) as Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Upon accepting his new appointment to what is commonly referred to as the Helsinki Commission, Chairman Hastings stated, "I am humbled by the trust Speaker Pelosi has in me and my ability to work cooperatively with my Democratic and Republican colleagues in the House and Senate, with the Administration, and with the leaders of the 55 other countries which are signers of the Helsinki Final Act."

Congressman Hastings will become the first African-American to chair the Commission and will continue his trailblazing work in the areas of human rights, economic development, and parliamentary diplomacy.

Congressman Hastings is uniquely qualified to assume the Commission chairmanship. He became the first American elected President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in 2004 and held that position through July of 2006. He currently is the Assembly's President Emeritus. During this period, Chairman Hastings traveled to more than half of the OSCE's participating states and met with heads of state and government, parliament speakers, foreign ministers, representatives of human rights organizations and other NGOs. The Congressman also has tremendous experience in the field of election observation.

Chairman Hastings noted, "I am so proud to follow in the foot steps of Congressman Dante Fascell, the first chairman of the Helsinki Commission, and Congressman Bill Lehman, the former chairman of the foreign operations appropriations committee. Both Bill and Dante were mentors to me and legends in South Florida and around the world. I know both of them would be proud of today's announcement and that I have lived up to their expectations"

"As a Member of the powerful House Rules Committee, the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and now chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I am unusually situated to influence public policy on behalf of my constituents both domestically and internationally and with a focus on the most salient issues confronting the American people today."

"Few Members of Congress face such a challenging agenda and fewer still are given such an opportunity to meet these challenges. I embrace this enormous opportunity and commit myself to working night and day to meet these challenges."

"Not many people in Congress and many less outside Congress know what the Helsinki Commission is. Trust me, this will change dramatically over the next two years."

"Finally, let me just say that it is both an honor and privilege to serve in the House representing the People of Florida's 23rd Congressional District for the past 14 years, and I look forward to having this privilege for

many more years to come. I especially look forward to representing my district, my state, and this nation as Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe."

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is an independent U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE commitments.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

The Commission contributes to the formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings and in certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, NGOs, and private individuals from other OSCE participating States.

The Commission convenes public hearings and briefings with expert witnesses on OSCE-related issues; issues public reports concerning implementation of OSCE commitments in participating States; publishes a monthly Digest with up-to-date information on OSCE developments and Commission activities; and organizes official delegations to participating States and OSCE meetings to address and assess democratic, economic, and human rights developments firsthand.

## **#2 Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Steps Down By Bagila Bukharbayeva AP, January 8, 2007**

ALMATY, Kazakhstan -- The prime minister of oil-rich Kazakhstan resigned Monday in the wake of criticism of his performance by the heavy-handed president of the Central Asian country.

Daniyal Akhmetov, who served as prime minister since 2003, offered his resignation at a Cabinet meeting, thanking President Nursultan Nazarbayev for "the high honor and trust shown to me," the government's press office said in a statement.

No reason was given for the move, which will lead to the appointment of a new government. Akhmetov had come under Nazarbayev's criticism for poor strategic planning, overspending and other mistakes. Following his re-election in late 2005, Nazarbayev weakened Akhmetov's role in his Cabinet.

Nazarbayev, who has ruled Kazakhstan as president since its independence in 1991 and has long resisted democratic reforms, regularly replaces his prime ministers as he tries to secure his position and balance interests of various powerful elite groups.

Free-market reforms and generous foreign investment in the vast energy sector have helped make Kazakhstan one of the most economically successful post-Soviet states, with annual economic growth of almost 10 percent the past several years.

However, the Kazakh economy lacks transparency and is dominated by the less-stable raw materials sector.

Oraz Zhandosov, leader of the opposition Nagyz Ak Zhol party and former National Bank chairman, said Monday that Akhmetov's resignation was expected "because he has done little good" for the economy.

"He was weak in terms of ideas and ability to build a good team," Zhandosov told The Associated Press.

Nazarbayev is expected to propose his choice of new prime minister at a parliament session on Wednesday, officials said.

### **#3**

#### **Belarus and Russia Dispute Cause of Oil Cutoff**

**By Steven Lee Myers**

**New York Times, January 9, 2007**

MOSCOW, Jan. 8 — Supplies of Russian crude oil headed to European markets came to a halt overnight, officials said Monday, in the latest manifestation of rapidly deteriorating relations between Russia and Belarus.

The head of Russia's oil pipeline monopoly accused Belarus of illegally siphoning oil beginning Saturday in an escalating dispute over duties and transit fees. Belarus's foreign ministry acknowledged the halt but denied responsibility, suggesting that the Russians had instead caused the stoppage at their common border.

Regardless of the cause, the disruption along the Druzhba, or Friendship, pipeline affected supplies of crude oil headed to Poland, Germany and Ukraine. In the short term, at least, the halt should have a minimal effect, because refineries in those countries maintain reserves. In the longer term as well, the disruption is not as threatening as a shut-off of natural gas, because alternative sources of oil are more readily available.

Still, a prolonged disruption could be worrisome. Oil prices rose on the news, and the dispute rekindled concerns in Europe about the reliability of energy supplies from Russia.

"This shows us once again that arguments among various countries of the former Soviet Union, between suppliers and transit countries, mean that these deliveries are unreliable from our perspective," Poland's deputy economics minister, Piotr Naimski, said in televised remarks, according to The Associated Press.

The shutdown of Druzhba, one of the highest-capacity pipelines in the world, took place a week after Russia and Belarus negotiated a last-minute agreement that sharply raised the price Belarus would have to pay for natural gas. The deal came after brinkmanship by each side that raised the specter of disruptions of natural gas deliveries across Europe, like one that followed a dispute between Ukraine and Russia in 2006.

Belarus, led by an autocratic president, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, has reacted furiously to the terms of that deal and to Russia's tactics in the talks that led to it. Last week, Belarus called Russia's conduct shameful.

Russia has responded by saying that it is simply raising the costs of oil and gas to market prices. Belarus and other former republics of the Soviet Union have long bought oil and gas at a discount, compared with European customers.

"Belarus has cast prudence to the wind," Andrei V. Sharonov, a deputy economic development minister, said in remarks on the Moscow radio station Ekho Moskvyy, referring to what he, too, called the illegal siphoning of oil. "This looks like a trade war."

He later said that Russia would suspend all oil shipments through Belarus, blaming it for the initial disruptions. His remarks suggested that the disruption could last indefinitely.

For the last decade, Russia and Belarus, two countries bound by history and deep ethnic, cultural and social ties, have moved haltingly toward the creation of a union, with a common currency and even,

ultimately, the creation of a single unified state, as negotiated in a 1996 treaty between Mr. Lukashenko and President Boris N. Yeltsin.

The union has never come to fruition under President Vladimir V. Putin. In the past month, the two countries have seemed instead to be negotiating the terms of their divorce, which, like many, is becoming nasty.

Beginning New Year's Day, Russia began charging Belarus \$100 per thousand cubic meters of natural gas, compared with the \$46 it charged last year. The price is to increase steadily to the level charged in Europe — now \$265 on average — by 2011.

As those negotiations dragged on bitterly, Russia also imposed a separate duty of \$180 a ton on oil it sold to Belarus, which has been sold at steeply subsidized prices. Mr. Lukashenko's government responded to the oil duty last week by announcing a \$45 a metric ton fee on shipping oil across Belarus on its way to other parts of Europe.

These are the fees are at the heart of the dispute that has shut down the pipeline.

Mr. Sharonov, in his radio interview, said Mr. Lukashenko's government had begun seizing the oil as payment for the transit fee.

The head of Russia's pipeline monopoly, Semyon M. Vainshtok, said in a statement that Belarus had siphoned 79,900 metric tons of oil since Saturday "without warning anyone."

He said, "Transit is a sacred cow," and vowed to use other means of transport to supply customers in Europe.

On Sunday, prosecutors in Belarus filed suit against Mr. Vainshtok, accusing him of having violated customs duties by not paying the new transit fee. A hearing scheduled for Monday, however, was canceled.

In Belarus, there were conflicting reports about what had unfolded. While the foreign ministry denied responsibility, an official from the Druzhba pipeline told Russian news agencies that operations had been halted on orders from Belneftkhim, the Belarus pipeline monopoly. Neither the ministry nor the companies would elaborate.

Belarus has used its cheap supplies of oil and gas to shore up a Soviet-style economy and earn hard currency, in the case of oil, by exporting refined products at world prices. For Mr. Lukashenko's government, the changing economics could weaken his iron control on the country of 10 million.

"The Belarussian people may not realize the extent to which they have been propped up by Russian energy, the extent to which the Belarussian miracle that Lukashenko talks about was built on legs of clay," said Rory MacFarquhar, an economist with Goldman Sachs in Moscow.

The impact in Belarus, where the news media is tightly controlled by the state, remains uncertain.

Pavel Daneyko, the director of the Institute for Privatization and Management, a business consultancy in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, said Mr. Lukashenko's government faced two difficult options: a liberalization of the country's economy or a populist propaganda war against Russia.

"If there is a clear war with Russia," he said by telephone, "then the society may be able to weather the situation."

#### **#4**

##### **Russian Extortion, Continued**

**Now an oil pipeline through Belarus runs dry. Will its customers in Western Europe finally be stirred?**

**Editorial**

**Washington Post, January 9, 2006**

RUSSIA'S CONTINUING attempt to squeeze neighboring Belarus yesterday led to the shutdown of a pipeline carrying oil to Europe -- another stark reminder of how the Kremlin's aggressive use of energy as a political tool threatens Western democracies as well as its neighbors. Just days after forcing Belarus to accept a huge increase in the price of natural gas, the government of Vladimir Putin stopped oil deliveries in an attempt to impose a large new duty that would eliminate a longstanding and lucrative subsidy. Because the pipeline carrying oil to Minsk also serves the rest of Europe, Poland, Germany and other European Union countries also did not receive Russian oil deliveries. Those countries have reserves to fill the gap for the near future. But once again the message should be clear: Countries that depend on Russia for energy can be subject to capricious and politically motivated demands -- and interruptions of supplies if those demands are not met.

Belarus has been a faithful ally of Russia; its autocratic president, Alexander Lukashenko, has made himself a pariah in the West by stealing elections, imprisoning and murdering opposition leaders, and supplying weapons to rogue states. But Mr. Lukashenko has irritated Mr. Putin by failing to follow through on an agreement to merge his country with Russia. Now he is getting his punishment: an abrupt withdrawal of energy subsidies that in recent years have propped up his state-dominated economy. The Belarusian president consequently must choose between giving Mr. Putin what he wants or trying to make Belarus a genuinely independent country. Since the latter would require groundbreaking political and economic liberalization, the Kremlin's risk may not be great. Belarus has already agreed to hand control of its gas pipeline to Russia, a concession Mr. Lukashenko had long resisted.

Other Russian neighbors are fighting back against its energy imperialism. Azerbaijan last week stopped buying Russian gas rather than agree to a huge price increase; it then reduced the amount of oil it pumps through a Russian-controlled pipeline. Azerbaijan offended Mr. Putin by agreeing to supply its own gas from a field soon to come online to neighboring Georgia, whose democratic and pro-Western government is Moscow's first target. Both Caucasian countries have the prospect of ending reliance on Russian supplies in the near future; in that respect, they are considerably better off than the European Union, which gets a quarter of its gas from Russia.

Western governments are watching Mr. Putin's hardball tactics with concern; yesterday they called for an immediate resumption of supplies through the Belarusian pipeline. They do not, however, have a policy for countering the Russian threat. Even the members of the European Union cannot agree among themselves on whether to appease Russia -- by offering new long-term contracts and capital for investment in oil and gas projects -- or push back, which they could do by insisting that Mr. Putin sign an international "energy charter" that would curtail his monopolistic practices. The attack on Belarus ought to rule out the appeasement option.

#### **#5**

##### **Congress on collision course with Moscow**

**By Stephanie Kirchgaessner and Guy Dinmore**

**Financial Times, January 10, 2007**

The Bush administration's relationship with the Kremlin has chilled considerably since the moment in 2001 when the US president famously looked into the soul of his Russian counterpart and declared that Vladimir Putin was "very straightforward and trustworthy".

And Washington's stance towards Moscow could become even more frosty in coming months, potentially colliding with expected attempts by Russia to use its new found oil and natural gas wealth to step up its investment in the US, including the expansion of Gazprom, its national energy group, into the US market.

For years most lawmakers in the Republican-controlled Congress have taken the White House's lead in their stance toward Russia. Now experts predict that mounting concerns on Capitol Hill, on issues ranging from Mr Putin's commitment to democracy to questions about the security of western investments in the Russian energy sector, could see lawmakers taking a more robust, sceptical approach.

Barney Frank, the Democratic lawmaker who, as chair the House financial services committee has an influential voice on foreign investment issues, exemplified the expected change in tone last week in a speech to the National Press Club.

In remarks that extolled the "absolute security" of the US market, Mr Frank took a shot at the Kremlin when he remarked: "Where do you want to invest? Russia? So Putin can steal your company?"

The 2008 presidential race could also colour relations with Russia. Two of the Kremlin's most vociferous critics are contenders for the White House: Democrat Joseph Biden who heads the Senate foreign relations committee and John McCain, a favourite to win the Republican nomination.

The defeat in the recent midterm elections of Republican congressman Curt Weldon, a staunch defender of the Kremlin, and the ascension of Democrat Tom Lantos to the top ranks of the House international relations committee, are also likely to renew the focus on allegations of human rights abuses in Russia, including the controversy over the forced sale of Yukos, the energy group, and the imprisonment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, its former chief executive.

One Democratic Senate source said Russia had been "flying under the radar screen" because Washington had largely focused its attention on Iraq, Iran and North Korea, but that concerns had become increasingly hard to ignore.

"To some extent, it's not our business to regulate the Russian economy, but to the extent they use their control over the Russian economy to affect countries that are close friends and partners, that's something we care about," the person said. "I would hope that we don't respond to bad behaviour with protectionism of our own but one can't discount that option entirely."

One Washington business lobbyist, noting the recent storm over Shell ceding control of its Sakhalin-2 oil and gas project in Russia to Gazprom, agreed: "I wouldn't be surprised if Russian investment in the US was subject to higher political attention in Congress given that Russia has basically expropriated western investments."

Marshall Goldman, associate director of the Davis Center for Russian Studies at Harvard, says Russia has \$300bn in cash "rolling around" and that the recently proposed \$2.3bn takeover of Oregon Steel by Evraz, a Russian steel group, is "just the beginning".

"I think we have to learn there really isn't much to restrain them. But if they engage in these kinds of games, people can play them too," Mr Goldman says.

Ultimately, Congress's ability to affect the US government's overall relationship with Russia will be limited. Critics will not have a formal vote, for example, over an agreement hatched by the White House that paves the way for Russia to join the World Trade Organisation. However, lawmakers could seize an expected request by the White House for Congress to repeal the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment as an opportunity to air broad grievances. The amendment subjects Russia's trading status to annual review and must be repealed in order to give Russia permanent normal trade relations.

Don Evans, who served as commerce secretary during Mr Bush's first term and who last year turned down a top position at Rosneft, the Russian energy group, offered to him by Mr Putin, said in an interview with the Financial Times that Russia's inclusion in the WTO would ultimately foster greater understanding between it and the US and would help integrate Russia into the global economy.

"The issues people want to point to all the time will be a few cases within the [Russian] energy sector that get all the attention," said Mr Evans, who heads the Financial Services Forum, banking lobby group. "But all the American companies that are providing other services and goods...are doing very, very well."

## #6

### **How The Holocaust Influenced One Man's Struggle For Soviet Jewry**

**By: Benjamin "Buddy" Korn**

**Jewish Press, Wednesday, January 10, 2007**

The recent reunion, in Washington, D.C., of activists from the Soviet Jewry protest movement was an opportunity to see old friends and reminisce about a bygone era. But for Philadelphia attorney Joe Smukler, it was also a time to reflect on the lessons to be learned from their unique, history-changing experiences.

Joe and his wife, Connie, were not cut from quite the same cloth as most of the Washington reunion attendees, who had been leaders of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), the main Jewish establishment organization fighting for Soviet Jews. During the early days of the Soviet Jewry movement in Philadelphia, the Smuklers were leaders of a non-establishment group called the Committee of One Thousand.

"Admittedly, it was an optimistic name," Smukler said in a recent interview. "The idea was that it would consist of one thousand local activists for Soviet Jewry. In reality, it was never more than a few dozen. But the energy and commitment of our members really sometimes made it feel like we had a thousand people."

It was an era when idealists and activists were having a real impact on the world. "We saw the successes of the civil rights movement, and the anti-Vietnam war protests," he said, "and we started to realize that we could really do it – that if we fought hard enough, we could open the gates of the Soviet Union."

The Smuklers declined to become the Philadelphia branch of the NCSJ because the group did not seem to be sufficiently activist-minded. But they also declined to become affiliates of the activist, non-establishment camp led by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry.

"The divisions and disagreements between the established groups and the activists were a source of great frustration for us," Joe recalled. "I couldn't stand the idea that the same kind of internal fighting that hampered American Jews during the Holocaust was happening all over again. So in Philadelphia, we basically forced a merger of the establishment elements, the activists, and our committee. We called it the Philadelphia Council for Soviet Jewry, and I am proud to say that it was a model for unified action. It was more activist than the traditional, established groups – but at the same time, it was respectable enough to be taken seriously in the halls of power."

Ensuring that the mistakes of the Holocaust years were not repeated was a major factor motivating Joe Smukler's involvement in the fight for Soviet Jewry.

"Arthur Morse's book *While Six Million Died* was a very significant influence," he said. "It appeared just when the Soviet Jewry movement was starting to take shape. Morse articulated what many of us knew in our hearts, but which nobody had ever documented before – that the Roosevelt administration could have saved many Jews from the Holocaust, but it chose not to. And that American Jewish leaders could have influenced President Roosevelt to intervene for the refugees – but they were afraid to speak out.

“Later, other scholars published additional research revealing even more about America and the Holocaust, such as David Wyman’s *The Abandonment of the Jews*. It was all kind of a shock to us. I grew up in Strawberry Mansion, where many Jews looked at FDR not only as a hero, but almost as a deity. My opinion changed when I learned that he did nothing when he could have done something, for the Jews under Hitler. Of course this does not at all diminish our respect for his leadership in World War II and everything he did for America. But how can we ever forget the St. Louis, or the farce of the Bermuda conference? How can we ever forgive him for not acting when he had the opportunity to save Jewish lives?”

“The new books about Roosevelt and the Holocaust were extremely important in shaping our perspective. We were determined to prevent another abandonment. We resolved to never again respond to Jewish suffering with silence. The Holocaust became our frame of reference.”

At rallies, in speeches, and in the literature of the movement, there were frequent allusions to the slow response of American Jews to Hitler and the need for a more effective and outspoken response to the persecution of Jews in the USSR.

Not that everyone saw it that way, Smukler acknowledged. “There were some mainstream Jewish leaders, such as Max Fisher and Jacob Stein, who advocated a kind of ‘sha-shtil’ approach. They argued that noisy protests would make things worse for Soviet Jews. They urged us to put our faith in the assurances offered by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that his ‘quiet diplomacy’ would convince the Kremlin to permit Jewish emigration.”

Smukler remembered running into similar attitudes and obstacles from officials of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. “They had their own agenda – which was the agenda of whichever political party was in power at the moment – and they wanted to control our movement so they could shape it to suit their agenda.

“To me, this was a like a repeat of the 1940’s. There was no way we could follow such an approach. It had already been proven wrong – tragically wrong. We were not going to repeat the mistakes of the 1940’s.”

Smukler pointed out that during his visits to the USSR, Soviet Jews urged him to be as outspoken as possible. “They told us, for example, that there was a direct correlation between the number of letters written to each Soviet Jewish activist and the way the KGB treated that activist. The more letters from abroad, the more the Soviet authorities were reluctant to persecute him, knowing there were people abroad who were concerned.”

Even before he formally took on the mantle of Soviet Jewry leadership in Philadelphia, Smukler was making his presence felt on the issue. When he was president of the Philadelphia-area college campus Hillels in the late 1960’s, there was once a controversy over a group of Penn students who had chained themselves to the Soviet Embassy in Washington protest the mistreatment of Soviet Jewry.

“Some Jewish establishment types wanted me to punish these students – even expel them from Hillel,” Smukler recalled. “I would not allow that. In fact, I patted them on the back. They were courageous and idealistic, and deserved the Jewish community’s praise.”

He remembered another incident, from the early 1970’s, when a Soviet hockey team visited Philadelphia for a game. “We started to organize a protest. Local Jewish leaders tried to pressure us to refrain from protesting. We did it anyway. We prepared signs in Russian and English, with polite but firm slogans about Soviet Jewry. Then we bought tickets in seats in various sections of the old Spectrum arena, and held up the posters in such a way that no matter where the television cameras focused, the signs were visible. And there were Russian TV crews there, beaming it all back to the USSR.”

The Soviet players, seeing the signs, refused to skate onto the ice to start the game. Arena officials pleaded with Smukler to take down the signs. He agreed to do so – but instructed the sign-bearers to take them down very slowly, one at a time, so that the televised images going back to the Soviet Union would continue to show the signs for a while.

One of Smukler's proudest moments came in 1977, when an official Soviet newspaper, Izvestia, cited him by name as someone suspected of conspiring with then-Prisoner of Zion Natan Sharansky.

"If the Soviet authorities hated me so much," he said with a smile, "I knew I must be doing something right."

Benjamin "Buddy" Korn, associate director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies ([www.WymanInstitute.org](http://www.WymanInstitute.org)), is the former executive editor of the Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia.

**#7**

**Siberians Love Their Billionaire And His Largess  
Popular Gov. Abramovich Enriched Chukotka Region; Now He Wants to Leave**

**By Guy Chazan**

**Wall Street Journal, January 10, 2007**

ANADYR, Russia -- When Lyubov Vereshchakova heard that her local governor was resigning, she thought about collecting signatures to make him stay -- for good.

"God sent us Roman Arkadievich and we won't let him go," the kindergarten principal says, defiantly. "He must stay here for the rest of his life."

Most super-rich businessmen are reviled in Russia. But Roman Arkadievich Abramovich is an exception -- at least in the corner of north-eastern Siberia that he has ruled for the past six years. In Chukotka, affection for Gov. Abramovich borders on the cultish.

An orphan who during the 1990s rose to become one of Russia's richest and most influential oligarchs, Mr. Abramovich has spent a chunk of his personal fortune on making Chukotka more livable. Since his election in 2000, the economy has tripled in size: Once hemorrhaging people, it's now in the grip of a baby boom.

That has created a thorny problem for the 40-year-old tycoon, who is desperate to quit. When Mr. Abramovich first tried to resign, in 2005, President Putin asked him to stay on another year. Last month, he tried again. So far, the Kremlin hasn't given him an answer.

"I believe my mission is accomplished," Mr. Abramovich told a group of journalists late last month. "Life in Chukotka is now no worse than in any other part of Russia."

It's easy to see why he has had enough. Half inside the Arctic circle, Chukotka is a Texas-size expanse of treeless permafrost, nine time zones east of Moscow, where temperatures can plunge to minus 76 degrees Fahrenheit. Reindeer outnumber people four to one.

Mr. Abramovich never really made Chukotka his home. Since buying Chelsea football club, an English soccer team, in 2003, he has spent most of his time in Britain, where he has splurged on multimillion-dollar townhouses in London's ritziest neighborhoods and a vast country estate. He is now a bigger celebrity in Britain than in Russia, and rumors of his impending divorce -- which are flatly denied by Mr. Abramovich himself -- fill the British tabloids.

"It's obvious Abramovich has new toys to play with now," says Natalia Feoktistova, an English teacher here in Anadyr, Chukotka's regional capital.

But it's also obvious why the Chukotkans want him to stay. Before he arrived, some villagers were so hungry they walked 15 miles to the coast to eat seaweed.

Critics say his expenditures pale in comparison with the vast dividends he has earned off his political connections. One of the few 1990s oligarchs to prosper under President Putin, Mr. Abramovich sold his OAO Sibneft oil company to the state-controlled gas giant for \$13 billion in 2005. While he still owned it, the company saved \$1 billion from tax breaks granted in Chukotka. Similar arrangements landed another Russian oil baron, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in a Siberian prison for tax evasion.

Still, the thought that their governor may depart has thrown the people of Chukotka into panic. Once wholly dependent on Soviet subsidies, Chukotka is now addicted to the largess of an ultrarich mogul. They worry about how they'll survive without him.

Anatoly Kochnev, a local polar bear specialist, has a solution. "We should form a gang of reindeer herders and have them lasso us another billionaire," he says over a beer in a smart new Anadyr restaurant. "We could call it the Chukotka SWAT team."

Brought up by grandparents in Russia's far north after his parents died, Mr. Abramovich first set eyes on Chukotka in 1999 when he was running for parliament. "I had never seen anything so awful in my life," he says.

Anadyr was a city of abandoned apartment blocks and broken windows. The massive subsidies that kept its economy afloat in Soviet times had vanished. Miners who once earned sky-high salaries hadn't been paid for years. Chukotka's reindeer herd plummeted as starving natives ate their livestock. Rats prowled the basement of Anadyr's hospital.

In 2000, Mr. Abramovich ran for governor, winning more than 90% of the vote. "People said I did it because I had lived in the north and had a difficult childhood, or because I wanted to atone for my sins as a businessman," he says. "You can choose whichever reason you like. None of them are right."

His true motivation, he says, was more basic. "When there's 50,000 people, you feel you can do something for them, ... take responsibility for them," he says.

There were financial incentives, too. At the time, Chukotka was one of several regions offering big tax breaks to companies that set up shop there, though most only did so on paper. Mr. Abramovich's aides say Sibneft plowed more into Chukotka's crumbling infrastructure than it saved in taxes.

The governor also started paying income tax there -- around \$30 million in 2001, or a quarter of the region's total revenue (though he didn't pay local tax on the proceeds from the Sibneft sale, since that company was held offshore). Over the past five years, aides say, he has spent more than \$1 billion out of his own pocket to fund local charities.

Awash with oligarch cash, Anadyr is now neat and tidy. Its apartment houses have been freshly painted bright red, blue and green. The city has a new power plant, a new airport terminal and a heated, indoor ice rink.

The influx of money has been a boon for Chukotka's native people, the Chukchi, many of whom spent the 1990s in alcohol-racked despair. Native villages have new schools and hospitals, and the local reindeer herd has doubled, to nearly 200,000. Businessmen are now trying to market vacuum-packed reindeer chops to restaurants in Moscow.

But even before Mr. Abramovich has taken leave, Chukotka's economy is suffering. Along with the governor, Sibneft had been a major local taxpayer; but after the state gas company bought it in 2005, it re-registered it in St. Petersburg, depriving Chukotka of a big chunk of tax revenue.

Mr. Abramovich insists things will never be the way they were in the 1990s. "New hospitals and schools won't be built at the same rate as before, but they're not needed now," he says. He has wrung promises from the Kremlin of fat handouts for years to come, and he'll still be paying income tax in Chukotka, he says.

But the region's economy is no more viable than it was when he first arrived. Tin and tungsten mines have been shut down and the local bread factory still has to import flour. Chukchi walrus hunters and reindeer herders will always need state support.

"Traditional occupations are always loss-making, and people here don't know how to do anything else," says deputy governor Viktoria Anisimova.

Lyubov Vereshchakova takes visitors around her kindergarten, which was rebuilt in 2003 on the governor's dime. Once a drafty ruin, it now boasts toy-filled rooms with aquariums and potted plants, and corridors brightly painted with murals.

Like many others in Anadyr, she fears for the post-Abramovich future. Whoever comes after him, she says, will be "all talk and no action." "We've had that type before," she says.

## **#8**

### **Ukraine memorial vandalized JTA Brief, January 11, 2006**

A Holocaust memorial sign was vandalized in Ukraine.

A plaque at the Elektroterm plant in Kharkov commemorating Jews murdered there by the Nazis in 1941 was damaged and painted over with swastikas. The incident took place Dec. 31 but was reported to the media only Wednesday.

"We are sure that this is an act of anti-Semitism," Aleksandr Kaganovsky, chairman of the Kharkov Jewish religious community, told JTA.

### **Ulyanovsk Mayor Reaches Out to Jewish Community After Anti Semitic Act FJC.ru, January 11 2007**

ULYANOVSK, Russia - The Mayor of Ulyanovsk paid a visit to the local Synagogue, following a recent Anti Semitic attack. The mayor guaranteed Rabbi Yosef Marozov, that the local law enforcement will do their utmost to pursue the attackers and protect the safety of the members of the Jewish community and their property.

In a gesture of friendship the mayor presented a silver jug from the city to Rabbi Marozov and the Rabbi in turn gave the Mayor a silver Menorah.

## **#9**

### **Tatarstan Government Gives Major Grant to Rebuild Historic Synagogue and Jewish School FJC.ru, January 11, 2007**

KAZAN, Russia - The President of the Republic of Tatarstan donated \$400,000 to the Jewish Community of Kazan, to renovate the historic synagogue and Jewish school building.

This winter marks the tenth year since the Jewish Community, received the keys to the synagogue after 70 years of being closed by the communist regime. Ten years ago Rabbi & Mrs. Gorelick were sent by the Chabad Lubavitch movement to rebuild Jewish life in the city, and have successfully established various religious and educational institutions.

The Kazan "White Stone Kremlin" served as host to the event, where the President gave a warm speech congratulating the Jewish Community. He stated that the Jewish Community will always feel at home on Tatar soil, since its aim is to unite all peoples, regardless of race or creed.

Rabbi Yitzchak Gorelick, the Chief Rabbi of the republic and Chabad Lubavitch representative to Kazan, responded by saying that "A thriving multinational society, depends on a respectful atmosphere, which influences all citizens of the republic and expressed the communities appreciation for the government grant for the rebuilding the Synagogue and Jewish day school.

The Chairman of the Community Mr. Alexander Velder, briefed the President with the Community's activities throughout the past 10 years, including the humanitarian activities of the organization "Chesed," funded by The American Joint Distribution Committee, who serve more than 3,000 clients in the republic. He also described the work being done by the youth groups run by Hillel, the Jewish Agency and Chabad.

During this meeting, the Mayor of Kazan took upon himself the responsibility for rebuilding the synagogue foundation which has stood for over 100 years. Rabbi Gorelick then received the "Kazan Medal," an award created by Russian President Vladimir Putin in honor of the 1,000 year history of the City of Kazan.

The Jewish Community of Kazan is a member of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia.

## **#10**

### **Putin urges more active measures against nationalism, xenophobia RIA Novosti, January 11, 2007**

MOSCOW - Russia's president called Thursday for more active measures to counter nationalism, xenophobia, and religious and racial intolerance, which he said not only violate human rights but also threaten national stability and security.

Vladimir Putin's statement, addressed to human rights organizations, comes amid growing xenophobic trends in the country, which has been plagued by a series of brutal attacks, some of them fatal, on non-Slavic foreigners in recent years.

"Unfortunately, the activities of extremist organizations do not always receive a principled public and political assessment, and I believe political parties, civil society institutions, and non-governmental organizations [NGOs] should all have a strong say on the issue," Putin told the Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights Institutions in the Kremlin.

Putin said he backed the council's initiative to draw up a federal program on the civil education of the Russian population.

"This project will help consolidate society and teach people tolerance and respect for human rights and freedoms," the president said.

A recent string of attacks on foreign students has cast a shadow over several Russian cities, in particular Russia's second city St. Petersburg, and Voronezh, about 310 miles south of Moscow, which have traditionally been popular destinations for foreign undergraduates.

In St. Petersburg, a student from Senegal was killed in April and a nine-year-old girl of mixed Russian-African origin was stabbed in early 2006. A nine-year-old girl from Tajikistan died of stab wounds in February 2004 in the city when a group of young men attacked her, her father and an 11-year-old cousin.

Russia's northwestern republic of Karelia was hit by a wave of anti-migrant riots in September when angry crowds attacked businesses owned by locally-based Chechens, demanding that all migrants from the Caucasus region be driven out.

In his address, the Russian leader also responded to Western attacks on a law on NGOs, passed in April on his initiative. The law imposed more stringent and complicated financial reporting and registration requirements for NGOs, fueling criticism from rights organizations and Western governments that Russia is backsliding on civil rights and freedoms.

"As far as I know, concerns about the authorities' crackdown on NGOs have proved to be unsubstantiated," Putin said.

The president praised NGOs for improving the situation for prisoners in Russian jails and pre-trial detention centers, and curbing police violence against inmates.

"The situation is changing, slowly but surely, thanks to the consistency and perseverance of rights organizations," Putin said.

The president also said the government was considering various means of supporting NGOs.

"Last week, we discussed various possibilities of backing NGOs, including through contests and grants," he said, adding that parliament had passed a law in December regulating the formation and use NGOs' resources.

"The law offers a fairly precise mechanism for providing grant support for NGOs dealing with key social problems, including the protection and application of human rights," Putin said.

## **#11**

### **Kazakhstan president completes formation of new government**

**Itar-Tass, January 11, 2007**

ASTANA, January 11 (Itar-Tass) - Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev has signed a decree appointing 11 members of the government, completing the formation of a new cabinet of ministers with Karim Masimov at the head.

The previous prime minister, Danial Akhmetov, tendered resignation on Monday and Nazarbayev accepted it.

The government stepped down together with the prime minister as required by the constitution.

The president appointed Masimov as prime minister, with consent from the parliament, in two days.

Nazarbayev said, substantiating his decision, that he had discussed the strategy of Kazakhstan's industrial and innovation development with Masimov many times.

"He has a clear understanding and plans of action in all areas of the activity," he said.

A key task of the new cabinet is to develop a concrete strategy of making Kazakhstan one of the world's 50 most competitive countries, the president said in the parliament.

"I should speak about the diversification of the economy. Real results with the reduction of raw material dependence of production should be got during the implementation of the second stage of the strategy of industrial and innovation development of the country. It is time to proceed from the development of policy

documents to concrete breakthrough projects able to qualitatively improve the structure of the economy," Nazarbayev said.

"Continuity, a new cadre, new energy and knowledge are needed first of all for solving new, complex tasks. My decision on resignation of the government is dictated by the wish to involve a new generation of managers in the work of the government," Nazarbayev said.

## **#12**

### **Putin Promises To Keep Monitoring NGO's Law Implementation**

**Itar-Tass, January 11, 2007**

MOSCOW, January 11 (Itar-Tass) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to keep monitoring the implementation of the law on non-governmental organizations further on with the aim to prevent any abuse of their rights.

"Judging by the information at my disposal, the fears the authorities might crack down on the NGOs have proved groundless," the Russian leader said at a meeting of the Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights on Thursday. "We shall keep monitoring the situation in order to prevent bureaucracy."

Putin asked the Council's members to brief him on any confirmed facts of groundless persecution of non-governmental organizations.

"I have no knowledge at this point any of them have encountered groundless red-tape. There were sporadic problems, but they occurred exclusively in the legal space," Putin said. "The fears some voiced over a likely onslaught on the NGOs by the authorities have turned out to be devoid of any foundation. Life has put everything in its place."

The president pointed out that the development of civil society institutions "is one of the most important tasks that will remain within the range of our attention in the future."

Putin declared the need for consultations between the federal agencies and representatives of non-commercial organizations regarding the by-laws complementing NGO legislation.

"The acts in question must be stated in righting. That will ensure the discussion should be specific and proposals, precise," Putin said. "I have not seen those by-laws myself, but I do foresee the possibility they may be burdensome and corruption-breeding. When they formulate legal acts, civil servants take care of their own convenience first and foremost, and not of the recipients of their services."

The president believes the Russian authorities must encourage businesses to support non-commercial organizations. As for the state, it should not finance the NGOs directly, he said.

"When other countries disburse funds, they pursue their own aims, quite often very different from those stated in public," Putin said. "We must create incentives for businesses to support the NGOs with their own money. That support should not be government-financed. More internal sources of funding have to be looked for, and as far away from the state and local bodies of power as possible."

Putin agreed that the system of grants for the NGOs might be improved.

"I shall be prepared to discuss that issue later once again," he said in response to a statement by one of the Council's members.

At the same time he disagreed with the proposal for establishing tax breaks for those companies which volunteer to support the NGOs.

"Tax breaks will prove an extra burden on the taxpayer and on the state. It would be a camouflaged form of state support," he said. "I am not saying that the state must be greedy. Moral and administrative incentives must be considered. The Finance Ministry's position has nothing to do with this."

### **#13**

#### **Belarus Learns That Days of Wine and Roses Are Over**

**By Steven Lee Myers**

**New York Times, January 12, 2007**

MOSCOW, Jan. 11 — President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko of Belarus appeared to be the last leader in the old Soviet neighborhood to realize that he was dealing with a different Russia.

For much of last year, he dragged out negotiations on new gas and energy deals, assuming that pleas of solidarity and Slavic brotherhood — encapsulated in a dusty treaty that a decade ago envisioned a glorious Union State of Belarus and Russia — would avert a steep rise in prices.

It did not, and now Belarus faces the economic and political consequences of Russia's newly assertive, hard-knuckled effort to cement its position as an energy power.

President Vladimir V. Putin, who spent the first seven years of his presidency supporting Mr. Lukashenko, despite what is widely reported to be an intense personal dislike, at last made it clear that the rules had changed.

When it comes to supplies of energy, cash is czar.

And it underscores how Mr. Putin, whose critics accused him of dabbling in Soviet nostalgia as he centralized his own political power, has consistently sacrificed political links to the former Soviet republics in pursuit of a new strategy. What Mr. Putin is creating in place of the Soviet empire of ideology is a new empire based on energy reserves and pipelines and, to his loyalists here, unrelenting market principles.

"We are still getting rid of some legacy of the Soviet Union," said Vyacheslav A. Nikonov, director of the Politika Foundation, a research institute with close ties to the Kremlin. Prices are rising for everyone, he added. "I don't know why Belarus should be an exception."

Indeed, it no longer is.

A day after Belarus agreed to drop a transit fee of \$46 a ton that prompted Russia to turn off for three days a pipeline that moved oil across Europe, the crude oil started flowing again on Thursday morning, as did the Russian profits that Belarus had hoped to share, as it had for the last decade.

These new deals — which more than doubled the price Belarus pays for natural gas and imposed an export duty on oil shipments — will generate billions of dollars of added revenue for the Russian energy giant Gazprom, as well as Russia's state and private oil companies, much as recent deals did with Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia.

Mr. Putin has long faced criticism for wielding the country's energy resources as a weapon of geopolitics — "tools of intimidation or blackmail," as Vice President Dick Cheney put it last year. Gazprom's similar showdown with Ukraine a year ago appeared to many to be a punitive measure against President Viktor A. Yushchenko's tilt toward the European Union and NATO.

The shutdown of the oil pipeline through Belarus revived those criticisms, but Mr. Putin's ministers could fairly say that they were now being consistent in demanding market rates for its natural riches.

“When a country has a cheaper price compared to European consumers, then Russia is accused of bribing them,” Viktor B. Khristenko, the energy minister, said this week. “But when we want to shift to market prices, then we are accused of blackmail.”

What is striking is the degree to which officials in Mr. Putin’s Russia used the dispute over energy to turn on Mr. Lukashenko. He is an autocrat who has created a dictatorship in all but name, but he enjoyed wide political support from lawmakers here — even if it was driven in part by a fear of the emergence of a Western-oriented alternative, as happened in Ukraine with Mr. Yushchenko.

Last March, after tainted elections in Belarus denounced as fraudulent in Europe and the United States, Mr. Putin praised the vote as fair and congratulated Mr. Lukashenko. Less than two weeks later, Gazprom announced that it would demand that Belarus pay more for natural gas.

On Thursday, Vladimir V. Zhirinovksy, the flamboyant Russian ultranationalist leader better known for his denunciations of the United States, called Mr. Lukashenko a dangerous man. “Lukashenko is a petty tyrant, and this tyranny should lead to his resignation and a new presidential election,” Mr. Zhirinovksy said in an interview on the state-owned Mayak Radio.

The collateral damage, if not the intended target, of price war was the Russia-Belarus union treaty. It was negotiated in 1996 between Mr. Lukashenko and a weakened Boris N. Yeltsin when Mr. Yeltsin faced a bruising re-election challenge from the remnants of the Communist Party.

In Russia, it was viewed as a populist attempt to win over those voters lamenting the decline of the Soviet Union. In Belarus, it was viewed as a vehicle for Mr. Lukashenko to become the leader of the newly unified nation, a notion that quickly became moot with the emergence of a strong leader like Mr. Putin.

In 2002 he dismissed Mr. Lukashenko’s constant public reminders of the treaty’s existence by offering, in essence, to absorb Belarus’s provinces into the Russian Federation. The offer was not well received. “Lukashenko does not want to be the governor of a Russian province,” Anatoly Lebedko, one of the Belarussian president’s fiercest critics, said in a telephone interview from Belarus on Thursday.

Since then, the two countries have repeatedly postponed deadlines to establish the Russian ruble as a common currency and to draft a constitution for the union, which officials now describe as little more than an economic alliance. The union has a bureaucracy and a budget, but few of its promises have been accomplished.

Andrei V. Sharonov, a deputy economic development minister, blamed Mr. Lukashenko, suggesting that he kept alive the dream of a union only to justify the subsidized gas and oil Russia was providing.

“When there is nothing but talk for many years and no deeds, preferences become meaningless,” he told *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, the official state newspaper, “and we are justified in putting all these things on a strictly economic footing.”

Russia’s new power centers — Gazprom, the pipeline monopoly Transneft and the state-owned oil giant Rosneft — will almost surely continue to press ahead, buying more and more assets at home and abroad, expanding the country’s energy network as long as the reserves hold out.

Still, some question the cost of Russia’s tactics. Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion and an opposition leader here, said in an interview as the New Year’s confrontation unfolded that the worsening of relations with Belarus “might have unpredictable consequences for everybody.”

“I’m not a big fan of Lukashenko, as you can guess,” he said, “but if our government spoils relations with everybody, there is something wrong.”