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TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: NCSJ Leadership Delegation travels to FSU

Next week, an NCSJ Leadership mission will be traveling to Russia, Ukraine, and Estonia. We are going at an opportune time given the recent political developments that are going on in all three countries.

In Ukraine, according to reports in the Russian language press, it appears that President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yanukovich have reached an agreement on holding early parliamentary elections. Russia and Estonia are embroiled in their own dispute over the relocation of a World War II monument to Russian soldiers. The diplomatic tensions spilled over onto the streets of Tallinn and Moscow last week, and this week Russia cut off Estonia's gas supply.

NCSJ will meet with government and community leaders in all three countries to discuss these and other issues important to their Jewish communities.

We will give you a full report at our Spring Board of Governors meeting on Tuesday, June 12th. For more information on the Board meeting please contact us at (202) 898-2500.

We look forward to seeing you in June.

Best,



Mark Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. Friday, May 4, 2007

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#1
Soviet Man
Editorial
Wall Street Journal, April 30, 2007

Vladimir Putin took the opportunity of his state-of-the-nation speech last week to hint that he would abide by the Constitution and step down as President of Russia when his term ends next year. The next state-of-the-nation speech, he said, would be "given by another head of state." That's a promise never heard from any of his Soviet predecessors.

Much of the rest of the speech, however, was an eerily familiar tirade against the West that could have been lifted from a Cold War script. Once again, foreign capitalists are staging a counterrevolution in Russia or, in the President's words, "there is a growth in the flow of money from abroad for direct interference in our internal affairs." Once more, a Kremlin ruler warns of rising threats of "mutual damage and even destruction."

Specifically, Mr. Putin threatened to suspend Russia's participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, the 1990 pact that limits the number of battle tanks, heavy artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters between the Atlantic and Ural mountains. Talk about nostalgia. The treaty's limits apply to NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Since the Warsaw Pact is dead, and many of its former members now belong to NATO, the CFE long ago lost its relevance. The quality of Russia's ground forces has steadily eroded since the CFE was implemented in 1992, making a Putin "moratorium" even more irrelevant.

A revised version of the treaty, the Adapted CFE, was signed in 1999 and sets military-equipment limits for each of its 30 national signatories. But the Adapted CFE has never come into force, and the old CFE still applies. NATO members have refused to ratify the new version until Russia makes good on its pledge to remove its troops from Georgia and Moldova. It is thus unclear what Mr. Putin's suspension threats would mean in practice.

It's entirely clear, though, that by threatening to ditch the CFE, Mr. Putin hopes to rattle Europeans worried about Russian weaponry on their borders. His specific aim is to scuttle U.S. plans for a missile-defense system based in Poland and the Czech Republic. The missile shield would protect Europe and the East Coast of the U.S. against long-range ballistic missiles from Iran.

Against all evidence to the contrary, Mr. Putin continues to insist that the proposed missile-defense system is directed against his own country. He knows that's not true, but it's a line that plays well in parts of Europe, especially France and Germany. His comparison to the deployment of U.S. Pershing missiles in Europe in

the 1980s, which led to huge anti-American demonstrations, is designed to tap into those Cold War-era emotions.

As for the CFE, Mr. Putin may be on to something there. The treaty -- in both its original and adapted forms -- has outlived its usefulness and deserves to go the way of the Soviet Union. The West would do far more damage to its security if it allowed Moscow to use empty threats about pulling out of an irrelevant treaty to divide the NATO allies and pressure them into concessions on really vital issues, such as the missile-defense system.

#2

In the End, Yeltsin Went the Way of Freedom

By Andrei Illarionov

Moscow Times April 28, 2007

Boris Yeltsin lived and died a free man.

The most important things he did in his life he accomplished on his own, right from the banya he built one log at a time with his own hands for his grandfather as a young man, to giving up his place in the Kremlin on the last day of the 20th century. This kind of independence is the mark of a free person.

Yeltsin was a dissident. Brought up in a family that had suffered Stalinist repression, he lived his whole life in defiance of it. In 1986, against all of the rules and traditions of Party bigwigs, he took to the streets alone to tour Moscow's trolley buses and stores, with no escort or fanfare. In the summer of 1991 he ordered the pilot of the plane bringing him back from Kazakhstan to land at a different airport, thus allowing himself and those around him to elude capture by the KGB agents waiting at the planned landing place. On Aug. 19 of that year, against the advice of his assistants and advisers he went to the White House, despite the uncertainty and real possibility that he could be killed.

Dissidence is a sign of a free person.

Yeltsin answered for his deeds. Both for his great accomplishments -- the victory over communism, the peaceful dissolution of the empire, the liberation of the economy and the introduction of a democratic constitution -- and for his gravest mistakes -- Order 1400, which dissolved the parliament in 1993, the first war in Chechnya and the falsification of the State Duma elections in 1996. He didn't hide behind anyone or try to shift the blame. He didn't just talk about taking responsibility -- he took it. Not only for his own errors, but for those of others. He didn't try to hide moments of incompetence, make excuses for his weaknesses or resort to meanness in blaming others. He took all of the responsibility on himself. Whether it was for those who lost their lives defending the White House, for hyperinflation and economic decline or the horrors of war, he took the heat for others, and paid for it with a fall in his own support and popularity.

To be able to shoulder responsibility and bear up under its weight is the sign of a free person.

Yeltsin made mistakes and, in keeping with his character, they were enormous. But he turned out to be the rare Russian politician who wasn't afraid to admit to them and, when possible, fix them. From the demolition of the Ipatiyev house in Yekaterinburg where Tsar Nicholas II and his family were executed came the erection of a monument on the same site. He began the first Chechen war and brought it to an end. As he left office, he apologized to the Russian people.

The ability to accept responsibility for your errors is a sign of real strength, and this kind of strength can only belong to a free person.

Despite his strong political instincts, Yeltsin could be remarkably naive. He could believe sincerely in the invulnerability of the ruble on the very eve of the 1998 devaluation, for example. But no matter how

mocking, grinding and baseless the attacks in the press became, he never targeted them with a word of political rebuke or tried to restrict the activities of journalists.

Freedom of speech is only understood and valued by a truly free person. The idea of freedom of speech was central for Yeltsin.

Yeltsin loved and clung to power. It's hard to imagine anyone who fought so hard to achieve power and then to retain it. For him, it was a rare and valuable instrument. Its value was in what it could be used to achieve, and not just for itself. He didn't become a slave to power. He was greater than power.

Yeltsin needed power to use it for Russia. It was as if there was nothing he wasn't willing to do for the country. In striving for its freedom and prosperity, he performed great feats and made tragic mistakes. He clung to power and then surrendered it for Russia. He pulled the country out of communism, out of empire and out of its past -- for the future. He pushed it forward, toward civilization, openness and freedom.

Every person creates in his own image, and it impossible for an unfree person to create a free society. Russia is free because Yeltsin and those around him in 1991 were already free.

For his dear Russians, the result was always either something wonderful or something catastrophic. Perhaps he didn't have the necessary education, vision or experience. But it is clear now that this small-town boy from the Urals showed more consistency, patriotism and human decency than any graduate of a big-city university.

No slave can be a patriot. A slave belongs to money, assets, corporations, friends or power itself. A patriot belongs only to his country. Patriotism is in the character of a free person.

Yeltsin spent his whole presidency looking for a successor -- not to defend Yeltsin's interests, but those of the country. Prior to the 1998 economic crisis, he looked for this figure among his young economists. All of them, from Yegor Gaidar to Sergei Kiriyenko, failed the test. Following the crash, his focus shifted to young members of the security services, all of whom failed the test even more quickly. Vladimir Putin, the eighth figure to be examined, looked like the best of the lot. The choice was made and Putin was given everything: power, resources, emotional support and so on. Most of all, he was given one important and heartfelt command: "Take care of Russia."

But initial doubts eventually turned to questions, and these questions ultimately turned into objections. Yeltsin reacted painfully to the betrayal not of himself, but of Russia. But there was nothing he could do to halt the march backward. His private concerns and his public appeals were cut off quickly. It had turned into his biggest mistake.

All that had been done in those years, in the course of an immense struggle that claimed so many victims, was lost. Everything created by Yeltsin in the name of Russian freedom has been systematically and methodically destroyed.

What could he do once the awful mistake had already been made? When nobody was guilty aside from Yeltsin himself? When he no longer had the power, health, time or even the opportunity to speak out and try to reverse the error. What could he do? Could he just sit back and listen to, tolerate and resign himself to what was happening? Could he have reconciled himself to it and, by his silent agreement, sanction the destruction of the free Russia he had created? That would have meant fighting for freedom all your life and, at the end of it all, helping bury it. Not a chance. Yeltsin refused to play along. Trapped at a dead end, Yeltsin found a way out -- the exit for a free person.

Yeltsin made the most important decision in his life himself. His heart couldn't stand the pain of today's Russia.

So he left.

As a sign of protest

As a sign of refusal.

As a sign that he would not accept what was happening to in the country.

He never surrendered his freedom to anyone. He remained free. Forever. A free man of a free Russia.

Andrei Illarionov, former economic policy advisor to President Vladimir Putin, is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. This essay originally appeared in Yezhednevny Zjurnal.

#3

Estonia and the Bear

Editorial

Wall Street Journal, April 30, 2007

Russians rioted in Tallinn and other Estonian cities this weekend, leaving store fronts shattered, dozens injured and one man dead. Their stated grievance was the removal Friday of a Soviet war memorial from central Tallinn. The real inspiration was Moscow.

The Estonian government transferred the bronze statue of a Red Army soldier and exhumed remains of Soviet troops to a military cemetery near the capital. Estonians are generous to keep them at all. The Soviets annexed their country in 1940 and only let go 51 years later. France doesn't have a memorial to the Nazi occupation.

Since its liberation, no former Soviet republic has managed to irritate the bear as much as this plucky Baltic mouse of 1.3 million people -- including 300,000 Russians -- famous for its ultramodern economy. Moscow has for years accused Estonia and Latvia of violating ethnic Russians' rights. These countries insist, not unreasonably, that Russians learn a few words of their language to gain citizenship.

The memorial fracas gave Cold War nostalgics in Moscow an excuse to strike fresh. The upper house of Russia's parliament called on President Vladimir Putin to break off diplomatic ties, and the Kremlin warned of "serious consequences." Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, a man unafraid of irony, said Estonia "was a country where human rights are not respected." Some of the 1,000 rioters arrested arrived only in recent days from Russia. Tallinn was calmer yesterday, but other towns saw looting and clashes with police.

In spite of such scenes, many Baltic Russians are none too displeased that the Cold War ended and left them stranded in what became prosperous and free societies that have recently joined the EU. Their ethnic kin to the east aren't so lucky. And the majority of Latvian and Estonian Russians have gotten their citizenship.

As the rioting shows, the Kremlin can still stir the Baltic pot. Fortunately, as a NATO member, little Estonia doesn't fear for its life, circa 1940.

#4

Belarus Jews fight for yeshiva but lack funds to renovate it

By Lev Krichevsky

JTA, May 1, 2007

MOSCOW (JTA) -- A historic yeshiva in Belarus that was returned to the Jewish community could be confiscated again if local Jews can't raise \$20,000 to renovate the building.

Authorities last week gave the community until May 10 to raise the money or face a lawsuit returning ownership of the building to the municipality.

At stake is the fate of the Volozhiner Yeshiva, the 1806 building of the former Jewish religious school in the town of Volozhin, 55 miles from the Belarussian capital of Minsk.

"If we lose the building, we'll say goodbye to a huge part of our heritage," said Yuri Dorn, chairman of the Jewish Religious Union of Belarus, an Orthodox umbrella organization.

In 2000, authorities in Volozhin, a town of 5,500 that once was predominantly Jewish but today has only 11 Jews, returned the building to Dorn's group.

Dorn says his organization has tried desperately to find resources to renovate the building, which was returned to the community in a rundown condition. In recent years the building had housed a deli.

Founded in 1803 the Volozhiner Yeshiva, also known as Etz Chaim, quickly became the spiritual center of Eastern Europe's Lithuanian, or non-Chasidic, Jewry.

Despite wars, czarist decrees and revolutions, the school stayed open in the historic building until World War II, when the Nazis occupied Belarus. They killed 800,000 of the country's Jews, including about 3,500 Jews of Volozhin and the surrounding area.

In the past seven years, Dorn said, his organization has raised \$22,000 from foreign donors to paint parts of the facade and remove garbage from the grounds. The building houses a temporary exhibit on the history of the yeshiva that attracts about 300 foreign Jewish tourists a year, he said.

"There were original plans to rebuild the yeshiva," Dorn said.

Some yeshivas in Israel and the United States showed interest in the project and would have sent students to study in Volozhin during the summer months. But the project would have cost \$400,000, beyond the community's means.

In early April, the Jewish Religious Union of Belarus received a letter from town authorities saying ownership of the building would be returned to the municipality if renovations did not begin before an April 26 court session. The deadline later was extended for two weeks.

According to Dorn, town officials are upset because the Jewish community seems unable to quickly renovate and maintain the building, located in Volozhin's historic center.

"It's unfortunate but the building, which is seen from the mayor's windows, is indeed in very bad shape," Dorn said.

In an earlier letter to the community, the town called the building's current condition "a shame to Volozhin" that "creates a negative image of the town in the eyes of its visitors."

Dorn said there is no indication that the town's decision is motivated by anti-Semitism rather than commercial reasons.

If the Jewish community cannot renovate the building, the town may want to sell it to a business that will invest and turn it into commercial property.

That is, unless the community miraculously finds the money for renovations.

#5

Young leaders gather for FSU education JTA Brief, April 30, 2007

Thirty young Jewish leaders from cities across the former Soviet Union gathered in Odessa for a meeting of Limmud FSU. Limmud FSU is organizing a Jewish educational marathon for October in Moscow.

According to Chaim Chesler, founder and chairman of Limmud FSU, the event should attract about 1,000 people. With more than 200 educational sessions and workshops scheduled, it is expected to be the largest event of its kind in post-communist Russia.

The weekend meeting was preceded by a smaller seminar held last month near Moscow. The April 13-15 seminar brought together about 150 Russian Jews aged 15-60.

The Russian Limmud, modeled after its British namesake, is billed by organizers as a vehicle to attract unaffiliated Jews with lectures and workshops. Topics range from Russian Jewish history and Jewish religious thought to Jewish arts and cuisine.

#6

Ukraine's foreign minister assures U.S. his country is maintaining democracy By Desmond Butler AP, May 1, 2007

WASHINGTON-Ukraine's Foreign Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk assured U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Tuesday that his country would adhere to democratic standards in resolving its current political crisis.

Yatsenyuk said that his political ally President Viktor Yushchenko was seeking a compromise with Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych over the president's order to dissolve Parliament and his call for new elections.

Yatsenyuk said that U.S. officials expressed concern that Ukraine maintain the democratic progress it had made since the 2004 Orange Revolution brought Yushchenko to power after another standoff with Yanukovych.

"We have to stick to democratic values, democratic standards --it's obvious for us," Yatsenyuk said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Ukraine's political stalemate erupted after Yushchenko accused Yanukovych of trying to usurp power by wooing pro-presidential lawmakers over to the majority coalition.

But tension between the two leaders had been building since Yanukovych returned to power as premier after his party won the most votes in last year's election and put together the majority coalition. The election was widely lauded as democratic.

Yushchenko signed a decree last month dissolving the 450-seat legislature and ordering new parliamentary elections for late May. Yanukovych, however, and his majority in Parliament have refused to fulfill the decree, and challenged it before the country's constitutional court, which is still deliberating.

Unable to get funding for the election from the Yanukovych-controlled government, Yushchenko postponed the election until June 24, but has said he will not back down from holding it.

Yatsenyuk said he assured U.S. officials that there is a legal basis for Yushchenko's move to dissolve parliament. He said that the president would seek a deal to end the impasse.

"Everyone is interested in compromise, but the president had to act and react and had to protect the constitution," he said. "In 2007 we faced for the first time in our history the dissolution of the Parliament. It's called democracy."

Yatsenyuk said that talks with Rice had been friendly. They discussed intensifying talks on energy security, the country's bid to join the World Trade Organization as well as aspirations for the European Union and NATO.

He said that Ukraine was getting strong support from the U.S. in its efforts to diversify its energy supply. The U.S. is aiding his country, he said, "in terms of supply of nuclear fuel for Ukrainian nuclear power stations."

On Monday, Yatsenyuk said in a speech in Washington that despite disagreements between the political factions over pursuing NATO membership, his government is committed to joining the alliance.

#7

For remote community's matriarch, the road to Judaism was winding

By Matt Siegel

JTA, May 1, 2007

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKY, Russia (JTA) -- Bella Leidental remembers exactly where she was the day she decided to walk away from Judaism.

Her co-workers on a Moscow ambulance crew, apparently remembering that she was Jewish, had sought to reassure her after a session of anti-Semitic jokes.

"Don't be insulted, you're not really a Jew," they told her that day in 1953. "You're an exception. We don't consider you a Jew."

With that, the young woman started on a winding journey to the farthest reaches of the Russian frontier, and eventually back to a life she thought was gone forever.

"I realized how awful it was to be a Jew in the USSR," said Leidental, now 73 and a silver-haired grandmother.

"I promised myself that there wouldn't be a single Jew in my family," she said of the episode, without even a whisper of regret. "So I married a Russian."

Today it's difficult to imagine the boisterous Leidental, a fixture in Kamchatka's tiny Jewish community, where people refer to her as "the mother of the Jews," being anything but a proud matriarch.

Whether interrupting the community's religious leader during a recent Passover seder, cracking bawdy jokes or doting over the constellation of children forever orbiting her like so many satellites, Leidental's dominant but loving presence embodies the image of a Jewish grandmother.

Her strength, born of a lifetime that she describes as "a mixture of death and comedy," came at a heavy price.

Born in Chernigov, Ukraine, in 1934 during the height of the Soviet-manufactured famine that killed as many as 4.8 million people, Leidental's life was a lesson in hardship from the start.

"I was an unwanted child, and it was very difficult for my parents," she said. "I knew that I was unwanted."

When many of the family's acquaintances fled Russia to settle in what was then British-ruled Palestine, Leidental's father, the founder of a local Jewish theater and a devout communist, insisted that the family stay behind.

"He loved Russia so much," she said of her father. "I inherited that from him."

His decision would prove disastrous. Chernigov, 90 miles northeast of Kiev, was devastated during the Nazi invasion. Leidental, her parents and an older sister were evacuated by rail and spent the war bouncing around the USSR, from urban Stalingrad to the salt mines of Solovetsk.

While she remembers little anti-Semitism at the beginning of the war, by the end she sensed a change.

"People started blaming the Jews for what had happened," she said.

Conditions deteriorated for Soviet Jews and Leidental's family was stuck for five years in a tiny apartment, which her father attributed to official anti-Semitism.

Struck by the poverty around her and increasingly wary of being known as a Jew, Leidental decided at age 16 to study medicine in Moscow. She couldn't make the grade, however, and opted to become a nurse.

Leidental survived on the free bread and salt set out on the tables in the local university cafeteria. She spent many nights in metro or railway stations to avoid returning to the apartment she shared with 14 people -- among them drug addicts and criminals, Leidental said.

Despite the troubles, she recalls the period with mixed emotions.

"They were the best years of my life," she said, "but also the worst."

Out of fear and frustration, Leidental began telling people that her Jewish features, which she had grown to despise, were actually Armenian.

After graduation Leidental was posted to a military garrison in the Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk, in line with the Soviet practice of assigning new graduates to jobs in undesirable locations in return for having funded their higher education. After resisting the posting for a year, Leidental ultimately relented, thinking Khabarovsk was about as far as she could get from her Jewish past.

She hoped to find and marry a Russian man who would free her from history. There was a slight problem, however.

"My blond-haired, blue-eyed Russian husband was more Jewish than me," said Leidental, laughing nostalgically at the memory of her husband, who died in 1972.

A sailor in the Red Fleet, he was a great admirer of the Jewish people, and his obstinate refusal to allow Leidental to denigrate her heritage slowly began to chip away at her. When she said she wanted a nose job, her husband said he wouldn't let her back in the house if she got one. He read heavily about Jewish culture and history, and passed on the information to Leidental with pride.

"He loved me so dearly that I stopped considering myself ugly," she said. "But at the same time, if people would ask me if I was Armenian, I would say yes."

Over the next 40 years, that too would fade. After moving to Kamchatka in 1958, Leidental worked on the first modern ambulance crew in the rugged and isolated Far Eastern region, a job that accidentally brought her back to the Jewish community.

Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, Leidental's crew received a call that would change her life. Unsure of the address, she stopped to ask for directions.

"The woman told me, 'You don't want the fifth floor, that's where the Jewish community center is,' " Leidental recalls. "I couldn't believe it. I didn't know there was any Jewish community here."

After several days of indecision, Leidental decided to visit the center, which was the regional office of the Jewish Agency for Israel. The Jewish Agency referred her to Tsafon, Petropavlovsk's small but vital JCC, and she seems never to have left.

Leidental wryly describes her role in the community as akin to the traditional Russian "marriage general," an honored guest invited to weddings to add an element of class. Indeed, there seems to be no community event to which she's not invited, nor that she'd refuse.

For the Jewish girl from Ukraine, the one who attributes her recovery from cancer two years ago to a prayer for health on Purim and speaks again with fondness of the town of her youth, the journey is not yet complete. But the tone has changed.

"My attitude changed," Leidental said, sitting on a weathered sofa in the Tsafon offices. "I'm very proud. Now when I open the door to a flat, the first thing I say is, 'I'm a Jew!' "

#8

Ukraine Holocaust Memorial Vandalized JTA Brief, May 2, 2007

A Holocaust memorial was vandalized in western Ukraine. The mass grave in the town of Khmelnytsky was desecrated last month, the local Jewish community reported Tuesday. The monument was established after World War II on the site of a Nazi wartime massacre of 8,000 Jews.

Local Jewish activists cleaning the site in April discovered that the monument to Holocaust victims had been damaged and the plaque broken. The activists appealed to the town council to build a fence along the perimeter of the memorial. Police are investigating, but no progress has been reported.

#9

Russian Jewry Congress: EU must give up double standards regarding Russia, Estonia Interfax, May 3, 2007

Moscow, May 3, Interfax - Vladimir Shternfeld, the chairman of the World Congress of Russian Jewry's Board of Trustees, expressed surprise over the European Union's plans to send a delegation to Russia to convey concern about protest actions near the Estonian embassy in Moscow.

"I am surprised by the European Union's reaction. I deem unacceptable the use of double standards based on whether a country is or is not a European Union member," he said in an interview with Interfax on Thursday.

Shternfeld remarked that the European Union does not plan to send a delegation to Estonia, where a Russian national was killed when Estonian authorities were trying to break up a picket near a Soviet war memorial in Tallinn. Nor did it send delegates to Denmark during mass disturbances sparked by the dismantling of the Youth House, he said.

Back on February 5, the World Congress of Russian Jewry sent an appeal to the Estonian authorities by the heads of veterans' organizations from the United States, Australia, Israel and Germany, protesting plans to dismantle the monument to Soviet soldiers in Tallinn, he said.

The appeal describes attempts to liken the Soviet army to the Nazi German army as "unacceptable and blasphemous" and describes as cynical the position of Estonia which, it said, votes for and sponsors UN resolutions condemning attempts to negate the Holocaust on the one hand, but, on the other, profanes the memory of soldiers who fought against fascism.

#10

Friction Between Estonia and Russia Ignites Protests in Moscow

By Steven Lee Myers

New York Times, May 3, 2007

MOSCOW, May 2 — Diplomatic tensions between Russia and Estonia spilled into the streets on Wednesday as protesters disrupted a news conference by the Estonian ambassador, harassed diplomats at the embassy and briefly blocked trucks crossing the border near St. Petersburg.

Russia escalated the dispute when a spokesman for the state rail company told news agencies that repairs would be scheduled on its links entering Estonia, halting shipments of oil to the country's Baltic Sea ports. Russia has been criticized for cutting off energy to punish neighbors that fall from favor.

In Estonia, officials blamed Russian hackers for shutting down government Web sites, while the president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, called on Russia "to remain civilized" after days of protests in each country over the removal of a Soviet-era monument in Tallinn, the Estonian capital, late last week.

Estonia's ambassador to Russia, Marina Kaljurand, said her bodyguards used pepper spray to protect her from protesters from a pro-Kremlin youth group, Nashi, who charged her at a news conference on Wednesday. The leaders of Nashi, a nationalistic group that organized the anti-Estonian protests and plans rallies and other events in support of President Vladimir V. Putin, told Russian news agencies that Ms. Kaljurand's bodyguards had beaten protesters.

The embassy in Moscow has been under siege by protesters since the removal of the monument, which has been a source of tension for years. The Estonian government ordered the monument removed from a square near Tallinn's Old Town last Friday after a night of rioting and looting that injured scores and left one protester dead, from a fight.

Many Estonians view the monument, erected in 1947 and known as the Bronze Soldier, as a symbol of the Soviet occupation that began in 1940 and ended with independence in 1991. They have campaigned to move it to a less conspicuous spot.

Others from Estonia's Russian-speaking minority, who have had uneasy relations there since independence, have denounced the removal as an insult to Soviet soldiers and a glorification of Nazi Germany. Those sentiments have been amplified by Russian officials and the largely state-controlled media here.

Estonia had already formally complained of harassment of its diplomats in Moscow, but the protests on Wednesday were the most disruptive. The raucous protests forced the closure of Estonia's consulate and the evacuation of diplomats' families, about 20 people, said Franek Persidski, a spokesman for the consulate.

Protesters attacked the Swedish ambassador's car at the embassy, prompting a formal protest from Stockholm. They also attacked Ms. Kaljurand's car as it left the offices of a magazine where she had held her news conference.

Russia's Foreign Ministry, questioned about the harassment of the diplomats, declined to comment. But a spokesman, Mikhail L. Kamynin, told Interfax, "We still believe that the tension and the reaction of civil society in Russia were provoked."

The Russian police, who have responded forcefully to anti-Kremlin protests in recent weeks, have appeared reluctant to disperse the protesters. A police spokeswoman said that one protester was detained outside the Estonian Embassy after spraying some substance; four were reported arrested Tuesday after tearing down the embassy's flag.

The bronze statue that was at the center of the protests was moved Monday to a military cemetery in Tallinn, while government workers excavate the ground in the park where it once stood. They have uncovered the coffins of 12 people, believed to be Soviet soldiers who died during the campaign to drive the Nazis out of the Baltics. The remains will be reburied in the cemetery, which Estonian officials say is a more appropriate place to mourn the fallen than a bustling city square.

Russia's actions and inaction prompted pointed rebukes from leaders in Estonia and expressions of concern from the European Union, which Estonia joined in 2004.

"It is customary in Europe that differences, which do, now and then, occur between states, are solved by diplomats and politicians, not on the streets or by computer attacks," Mr. Ilves, the Estonian president, said Wednesday, according to news reports from Tallinn.

On Tuesday, the foreign minister, Urmas Paet, said Estonian Web sites were being attacked from Internet addresses registered to Russian government agencies, including Mr. Putin's administration. The Kremlin did not immediately respond to a request for comment, saying a spokesman was traveling. Mr. Paet also accused Russian diplomats of meeting with protesters in the hours before the violence last Friday.

A group of Russian Parliament members visited Estonia this week, ostensibly to calm the tensions, but stirred anger by calling for the resignation of the Estonian government.

#11

Rhetoric Only Outdone by The Hypocrisy

Editorial

Moscow Times, May 2, 2007

As indignation and anger among ethnic Russians in Estonia has peaked over the last couple weeks, Moscow's rhetoric against Tallinn has been abhorrent. This was made clear Tuesday when a group of Russian lawmakers laid flowers at the foot of the Soviet monument that caused all the fuss.

The memorial to slain World War II soldiers has been the scene of clashes between ethnic Russians and Estonians for years, especially on the Victory Day holiday on May 9, when Russia celebrates the defeat of Nazi Germany. From the moment Estonian officials announced a plan to move the monument out of central Tallinn, Russian media, particularly the three state-run national television channels, have referred almost exclusively in their news reports to the "dismantling" of the monument. As viewers turned on their televisions Tuesday to the sight of the lawmakers visiting the monument at its new location, in a Tallinn military cemetery, many must have understood that they had only been given half the truth. They had been told about the removal but not the relocation, it would seem, to stoke public indignation against Estonia's "extreme nationalist" and "blasphemous" attitude. That indignation led to behavior that can only be

described as "inhuman" -- a favorite Kremlin word -- by the Russians who participated in the Friday and Saturday riots that killed one man and injured dozens of others.

Put plainly, Moscow's conduct in the whole affair has been glaringly hypocritical. When the Kremlin or City Hall explains why opposition marches in Moscow have been banned, they usually cite concerns over unrest and disorder. When the Estonian government tries to avoid the unrest and disorder that usually spoils May 9, Russian officials describe this as "blasphemy."

At home, members of opposition groups who throw mayonnaise or pies at political figures are branded "extremist." But in Tallinn, members of pro-Kremlin groups who take part in demonstrations where Molotov cocktails are hurled at police officers and shops are looted are being branded "patriotic."

Moscow is regularly accused of refusing to respect the independence of countries that were once under its control. In some cases these accusations, including from Estonia, come across as overblown and a bit paranoid.

But if we apply Moscow's own standards -- and the idea of "sovereign democracy" so beloved by Kremlin political theorists -- to the case of the monument in Tallinn, there is no excuse for the course Russia has taken. Surely the Estonians have the right to decide where to put a monument in their own capital.

When anyone dares to question Russia's official interpretation of past events, they are immediately accused of rewriting history. By playing fast and loose with the facts surrounding the recent clashes in Tallinn, Moscow is attempting to rewrite the present.

#12

Yushchenko Sets New Date For Parliamentary Poll

By Pavel Korduban

Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 3, 2007

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has re-scheduled the snap parliamentary election from May 27 to June 24. His opponents initially reacted as they had to his April 2 decree, which called for the election. The parliamentary coalition that backs Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich said that Yushchenko had violated the constitution and again refused to obey. Yanukovich, however, within several days signaled his readiness to compromise. He told a briefing on April 28 that his party would agree to a snap election if Yushchenko is ready for political talks. An early presidential election may be one of Yanukovich's conditions.

In an unscheduled TV address to the nation on April 25, Yushchenko announced that he was signing a decree re-scheduling the parliamentary ballot. Yushchenko made it clear that this decision had been prompted by pragmatic considerations, and that it was in no way a concession to his opponents. Explaining the need to re-schedule the election from May 27 to June 24 in the text of his April 26 decree, Yushchenko said that the refusal by Yanukovich's Cabinet to fund the election scheduled for May 27 and the inaction of the Central Electoral Commission (several of its members simultaneously called in sick) made it impossible to hold the election in May.

Commenting on the decree on April 26, Yanukovich accused Yushchenko of breaching all agreements reached earlier and of disrupting the talks between the two camps that had started on April 25. Yanukovich complained that he was "surprised," as Yushchenko had not consulted with him before taking this new decision. Yanukovich said that Yushchenko had re-scheduled the election because he was afraid that the Constitutional Court's decree on the early election, disputed by Yanukovich's coalition, would not be in Yushchenko's favor. The court, according to Yanukovich, was going to deliver its verdict on April 26, so Yushchenko acted just in time to forestall his own political fiasco.

The parliament disbanded by Yushchenko on April 26 passed a resolution condemning Yushchenko's new decree as unconstitutional, as was the case with his April 2 decree, and accusing Yushchenko of deepening the political crisis. Speaker of Parliament Oleksandr Moroz said that the new decree was "legal nonsense."

The majority coalition urged Yushchenko to withdraw his decree, and several parliamentarians drafted a bill calling for Yushchenko's impeachment. On April 27, Moroz instructed the parliamentary committee to discuss the possibility of launching impeachment procedures.

The discussion of impeachment was probably meant only to scare Yushchenko, as the procedure is legally very complicated and is hardly a realistic option. Parliament eventually chose the standard procedure of appealing the presidential decree to the Constitutional Court, and on April 27 Moroz announced that the court had begun to discuss this new appeal, although it has not yet delivered a verdict on the April 2 decree.

Yanukovych, addressing a rally of his supporters on Kyiv on April 27, repeated his old thesis that his coalition was not afraid of an early election, but that Yushchenko was not authorized by the constitution to call early elections at will. Yanukovych suggested that Yushchenko should agree to simultaneous elections for both president and parliament. "As he keeps saying that politicians should pass through the purgatory of the Ukrainian people, let him show an example himself," Yanukovych said.

Speaking at a briefing the following day, Yanukovych made the sensational announcement that his coalition may agree to a snap parliamentary election after all. Yanukovych insisted that there were no constitutional grounds for calling an early election, but he said that such an election could be the result of a political agreement reached at a negotiating table. "If we come to a conclusion that an election is needed, there will be an election," he said. Asked by journalists whether he would still like to hold a presidential election simultaneously with a parliamentary one, Yanukovych said that a political agreement on this might also be reached.

On April 30, parliament passed a resolution urging simultaneous early presidential and parliamentary elections. According to the resolution, a legal basis for this should be prepared by the fall, and the elections should be held no later than December 9, 2007. Moroz specified that respective amendments to the constitution should be passed in September, and the simultaneous early elections in that case should be held in late November or early December. Moroz explained that laws, rather than political agreements, should serve as the basis for early elections. Otherwise, he warned, "We are opening dangerous prospects, and whenever the president does not like parliament he will force an early election."

The April 30 resolution is probably a sign that the pro-Yanukovych coalition is finally psychologically ready for a snap election. The call for a simultaneous presidential election may be used as an element of pressure, a bargaining chip in negotiations with Yushchenko.

#13

Property rights and the wrong path to democracy

By John Kay

Financial Times, May 1, 2007

Boris Yeltsin's greatest achievement was his defeat of the 1991 hardline coup. But the measure for which he will be best remembered was loans for shares, which transferred control of the main economic assets of the state to a small group of oligarchs. The first of these legacies will shape the economic and political development of Russia long after Yeltsin's death. So will the second.

Not everyone shares that view of loans for shares. As assessment of the Yeltsin years filled the news last week, several commentators rushed to the defence, advancing the thesis that it is more important to establish property rights than to allocate them justly. But history shows both conditions need to be satisfied if markets are to work effectively.

A good place to start that historical lesson is as far away from Russia as possible. Argentina was the most spectacular economic failure of the 20th century. The elegant residences of Buenos Aires still provide evidence of a country once as rich as western Europe, while the slums of Buenos Aires provide evidence of a country that lost that status generations ago. Argentina's dysfunctional politics, central to its economic

decline, have their origin in economic history, most of all in an assignment of property rights that was definitive but unjust.

When settlers take occupation of empty land - or, as Europeans frequently did, treat land they occupy as empty - there are two methods of allocating property rights. Top down - by the dictates of a central administration - or bottom up - rights to land are acquired by working it.

In Argentina - as in Latin America generally - the top-down mechanism dominated. The beneficiaries were not, in the main, good landlords. The process of assignment established an indissoluble link between political influence and personal wealth. The rich were determined to maintain established property rights; the poor saw their best hope in upsetting that allocation. The resulting polarisation has characterised Argentinian politics ever since.

The English-speaking countries of settlement, rather than colonisation, were different. The bottom-up mechanism - the principle that the strongest claims to the land belonged to those who worked on them - came to dominate. That was, in a sense, the crucial issue of the American revolution. The Homestead Act passed during the civil war, and the war itself, settled the matter. In Australia, the Eureka Stockade, when miners asserted rights to the claims they worked, and the device of pastoral leases, which gave crown land to people who would farm it, were decisive.

These historical events arose from, and reinforced, a democratic political culture and an individualistic social one. Property rights were allocated, and personal success determined, by talent and effort not connections and ancestry.

After the collapse of communism, the issue was who would lay claim to the property owned by the failing state. The industrial assets owned by the regimes of eastern Europe turned out to be worth very little. But the resources in the ground of the former Soviet Union were worth a lot.

Juan Manuel de Rosas, Argentina's autocratic ruler in its early years of independence, also rose beyond his populist origins. Like Rosas, Yeltsin realised that the connection between political influence and economic resources could, through patronage, become self-reinforcing. Loans for shares was a top-down allocation of property rights, in which government traded economic power for political support.

Bottom-up allocation supports democracy, consensual politics and economic development that emphasise enterprise over the search for political favour. Top-down allocation leads to polarisation and dictatorship, yielding short-run stability and occasional violent disruption: Argentina's past and Russia's likely future.

It does not matter who has property rights as long as they are clearly defined, says a prominent school of economists, citing an insight that won the Nobel Prize for Ronald Coase. But in Argentina, the wrong choice coloured politics and society for a very long time. The path unwisely chosen in the mid-1990s may be Yeltsin's most enduring legacy.

#14

Ukraine premier says he and president reach agreement on early parliamentary elections Kyiv Post, May 3, 2007

The country has been mired in a political crisis since Yushchenko signed an order April 2 dissolving parliament and calling early parliamentary elections

KYIV (AP) - Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich have reached agreement Friday on holding early parliamentary elections in a bid to end a more than month-old standoff, Yanukovich said.

"There is no other way to solve this crisis except by holding democratic and fair elections," Yanukovych told supporters on Kyiv's Independence Square. He added that details needed to be worked out.

The country has been mired in a political crisis since Yushchenko signed an order April 2 dissolving parliament and calling early parliamentary elections - a move he said was necessary to prevent Yanukovych from usurping power. Yanukovych and his majority in parliament ignored the decision, calling it unconstitutional.

As the standoff dragged on, both sides brought their supporters to the streets for major rallies, and accused each other of acting in bad faith.

Yanukovych emerged from a meeting with the president Friday to say a breakthrough had been made. He told thousands of his supporters at an outdoor rally that the two leaders agreed to the creation of a working group that will decide what laws need to be adopted and when the election will take place. Previously, Yushchenko had set the election date for June 24.

Yanukovych said the vote would show which camp has more popular support.

"Those who like elections, who initiated them, will get an answer from you about who today must be in power in Ukraine," he said to applause from supporters.

#15

Reading Russia Right

By Rose Gottemoeller

Op-Ed

New York Times, May 4, 2007

THE criticism by Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, of the United States and NATO put one in mind of an alpha dog at the junkyard gate — tough, unrelenting, pugnacious. The trend started with his Feb. 10 speech in Munich, and in Moscow on April 26 his annual address to Parliament carried it forward. He railed against foreigners trying to change the economic and political system, even the culture, of the Russian Federation and called for a new law to prevent such imprecations. He also suspended Russian participation in a key arms control agreement, the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty.

Russians are clearly frustrated with what they perceive to be a lack of respect for their concerns, especially regarding the proposed deployment of American missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic. But to insist that the United States and NATO are the enemy? The argument contradicts Russia's own interests, never mind that it has little link to reality. The cold war is, in fact, over.

But Mr. Putin's omissions are important clues to Russian tactics. He had little to say, for example, about the defense budget and procurement of high-technology weapon systems. Instead, he focused on providing apartments for the troops — a powerful issue during this election year.

What is interesting is how much this approach differs from the past. In the 2004 election year, Mr. Putin flew in fighter planes and went to sea on nuclear submarines, promising the armed forces a range of new weapons. It was his way of cementing his authority within the Ministry of Defense. Nowadays, with his authority well in place, he can afford to promise housing for the troops and say no more.

Another issue he left unaddressed was the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Russian military spokesmen have been threatening to withdraw from this treaty, often as a response to United States missile defenses but sometimes to bring Russian missile deployments in line with those of neighboring countries.

Mr. Putin might have launched another attack on the missile treaty; he might even have announced Russia's full withdrawal. Instead, he took a swipe at the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty but left the

door open for talks to solve a long standoff with NATO, which wants Russia to withdraw its troops from Georgia and Moldova. This can be resolved without dealing a major blow to security in Europe. Not so withdrawal from the missile treaty: here Russia would begin a slide toward ruining the nuclear arms control system put in place in the closing decade of the cold war. This outcome would encourage countries eager to break out of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It would also ensure that Russia could post no claim to leadership in the world of international law and diplomacy.

Mr. Putin had good reason to stay silent on the matter, and the backing to do so. The Russian debate on the treaty is subtly shifting, with new attention to the missiles Russia will really need. Some Russians are arguing that the newest Russian intercontinental ballistic missile, the Topol, is already in production and could easily handle intermediate-range missile tasks as a kind of “universal missile,” while retooling defense plants to produce intermediate-range missiles would be expensive and the missiles could do only limited tasks. Other experts are arguing in favor of modern supersonic cruise missiles, claiming they are cheaper to produce and perfectly capable of responding to intermediate-range threats.

Mr. Putin thus has found a way to work the issue within his system, without sacrificing Russia’s option to lead on nonproliferation policy. The Kremlin has done so to good effect in recent months, working with its negotiating partners — even that “enemy” the United States — to advance issues with Iran and North Korea. Mr. Putin has left himself room to maneuver.

Washington and Moscow should be looking for new openings — difficult with both sides trading barbs. Defense Secretary Robert Gates had the right idea when he responded to Mr. Putin’s Munich diatribe with a light touch. A dose of that is needed now, along with a pact to re-engage quietly and stop publicly swatting at each other.

Topic No. 1 should be Russia’s concern about missile defenses in Europe. Washington has worked this issue well in recent weeks, offering Moscow a chance to participate in technical and operational aspects of the system. The fact that Russia is not ready to say yes should be no deterrent. Reversing a Russian policy so loudly declared will take time.

Washington can speed up the process by offering up some confidence-building measures that the Russian side would understand. One option would be to look again at measures the two countries have already negotiated, since the Russian system responds well to legal agreements. For example, in 1997 the United States and Russia negotiated the New York Protocols to improve Russia’s confidence in the nature of the United States national missile defense system. These measures should be re-examined to see whether they can be modified to assuage Russia’s concerns about defenses in Europe.

Relations between the United States and Russia are in a bad way, but we should not forget our long history of working through even the most sensitive problems. If we can get out of this junkyard, we should really be able to make progress.

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