



**WASHINGTON, D.C. November 30, 2007**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

In Brief: Russian Parliamentary Election

Dear Friend,

This Sunday, Russians will go the polls to elect a new parliament. There has been much written about the inevitability of the outcome – an overwhelming victory for President Putin’s party, “United Russia.”

Many observers have been extremely critical of the Russian government’s efforts to clamp down on the opposition parties. These groups have had little or no access to the media, let alone the ability to run an effective campaign. It is difficult to get a message across to the general population when candidates are harassed, detained and arrested.

While the outcome of the election is not in doubt, there are many questions and challenges facing President Putin and United Russia about their vision for the country. Among them, what will they want to accomplish after consolidating power and control of the government, and how will the government address the needs of those Russians who have not benefited from the energy boom?

I want to note something that is positive, and different from previous elections in Russia – an almost total absence of anti-Semitism from the campaign. It remains part of the ultra-nationalist agenda, but in less overt ways. We have included several stories in this week’s update on Sunday’s election highlighting the campaign, political parties and issues.

Also, I want to remind you of the special events being planned by NCSJ on Tuesday, December 11 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Soviet Jewry movement and the 20th anniversary of the historic Soviet Jewry march in Washington, D.C. We have organized a symposium on looking at the past, present and future of the movement. It is scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, from 1:00pm – 3:30pm, in our offices. That evening, we are hosting a reception on Capitol Hill where a new exhibit on the history of the movement will be unveiled. Please see the flyer below for details, and visit [www.SovietJewry.org](http://www.SovietJewry.org) to learn more about these anniversaries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark B. Levin'.

Mark B. Levin  
Executive Director



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

Celebrate the  
**20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
of the  
**1987 Freedom Sunday Rally**

Please Join Us: **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2007**

**NCSJ Symposium**

*“From Oppression and Isolation,  
to Freedom and Rebirth:  
The Past, Present and Future of  
the Soviet Jewry Movement”*



**1:00 p.m. to  
3:30 p.m.**



*Featuring*

SHOSHANA CARDIN, former NCSJ Chairman  
YULI EDELSTEIN, former *refusenik*, Member of  
Knesset • KEVIN KLOSE, former Moscow  
Correspondent for the Washington Post,  
President of NPR • WILLIAM KOREY, Soviet Jewry  
scholar • MARK LEVIN, NCSJ Executive Director  
JOSEPH SMUKLER, Jewish communal leader  
MARK TALISMAN, President, Project Judaica  
Foundation

At: **NCSJ, 2020 K Street NW, Suite 7800,  
Washington, D.C. 20006**

**NCSJ Reception &  
Exhibition Opening**

*“Speak Truth to Power:  
The Freedom Struggle of  
Soviet Jewry”*



**5:00 p.m. to  
7:30 p.m.**



**Co-Chairs**

Denis & Sarah Braham  
Rabbi Norman & Naomi Patz  
Alexander Smukler & Alla Shtraks

At:

**The Russell Senate Office Building  
Rotunda & Caucus Room  
Capitol Hill  
Washington, D.C.**

**R.S.V.P.**

[ncsjinfo@ncsj.org](mailto:ncsjinfo@ncsj.org) 202-898-2500



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. November 30, 2007

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**#1a**  
**Ukrainian cemetery vandalized**  
**JTA brief, November 25, 2007**

The Jewish cemetery in the Ukrainian city of Zhitomir was vandalized.

Unidentified vandals forced open the front door of the Ohel of Tzadik Rabbi Aharon from Zhitomir, a student of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.

Swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans were spray-painted on the walls and ceiling of the Ohel.

The vandalism took place within the last two weeks. Local police are investigating the case, but no arrests have been reported.

Acts of anti-Semitism in Zhitomir have been occurring almost monthly this year, but local Jewish leaders told JTA they are not sure that this is an act of anti-Semitism or, more likely, "vandalism organized by hobos or drug addicts."

#### **#1b**

##### **Ukrainian Torahs still not returned JTA brief, November 25, 2007**

Ukrainian Torah scrolls have not been returned to the Jewish community, despite a presidential decree.

In spite of Ukrainian President Viktor Yuschenko's Oct. 24 decree to transfer Torah scrolls held in Ukrainian state archives to the Jewish community within a month, government bodies and state archives say they are still not ready to do so.

Georgy Popov, head of the Ukrainian State Committee on Nationalities and Religious Affairs, said on the Inter TV channel Sunday that "there are some technical problems" and "it is necessary first of all to make some changes in legislative acts and other documents."

Aleksandr Bystrushkin, head of the president's humanitarian department, said the administration will demand adherence to Yuschenko's instructions without delay.

More than 1,000 historic Torah scrolls are sitting in state-run museums and archives in Ukraine, according to Josef Zissels, head of the Va'ad, or Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations of Ukraine.

Jewish leaders have been asking for their return to help revitalize Jewish religious life in the country. They believe Yuschenko will keep his promise.

The scrolls originally had belonged to synagogues and private Jewish households in Ukraine, and were either confiscated by Communist Party authorities during anti-religion campaigns during the Soviet era or seized by Nazi forces during the World War II occupation of Ukraine.

#### **#1c**

##### **Kasparov arrested in Moscow JTA brief, November 25, 2007**

Former chess champion Garry Kasparov was arrested after leading a protest to Moscow's federal election authority offices.

Kasparov was sentenced Saturday to five days in jail for holding an unauthorized march. He had been on his way to give election officials a letter claiming that the upcoming Russian elections are biased toward President Vladimir Putin.

Kasparov is the presidential candidate for the opposition Other Russia coalition. He was arrested at a demonstration in April, when he was levied a fine but no jail time.

On Sunday, Kremlin riot police broke up an anti-Putin rally near the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

## **#1d**

### **Ukrainian Jew gets top honor JTA brief, November 25, 2007**

A prominent Jewish leader and member of Ukraine's parliament received a top national honor.

President Viktor Yuschenko awarded Aleksandr Feldman the Order of Merit of first degree on Nov. 22 for his "prominent personal contribution to the Holodomor 1932-1933 history research in Ukraine and active public work to perpetuate the memory of the tragedy's victims."

Feldman, 47, heads the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine and International Center for Tolerance.

Feldman openly backed Yuschenko's call on Israel to recognize Holodomor, the great famine that killed millions of Ukrainians during 1932-33, as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people and organized Ukraine's Holodomor exhibition in Israel in September.

He accompanied Yuschenko on his state visit to Israel this month.

Feldman is a well-known politician, advocate of Jewish interests in the Ukrainian parliament and philanthropist. Previously he had received the Order of Merit of second degree and third degree.

## **#1e**

### **Ukrainian Jewish activists meet JTA brief, November 27, 2007**

Ukrainian Jewish activists met to discuss rising anti-Semitism and Ukrainian-Jewish relations.

More than 30 Jewish activists and experts from throughout Ukraine gathered Nov. 23-24 in Kiev for the annual meeting of the Coordinating Council of the Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations of Ukraine, or Vaad, together with the Zionist Federation of Ukraine.

Josef Zissels, a longtime Vaad and Zionist leader in Ukraine, told JTA that there has been a "reduction of [Zionist] activities" in Ukraine. Other participants complained that when Zionist activities did occur, there was little publicity.

"I did not get any information nor see any real action from Zionist organizations in Ukraine in the last two years," Valery Kontzevich, the Vaad and Zionist Federation representative in Sumy, told JTA.

This year the number of returning Ukrainian emigres decreased nearly 25 percent compared to the previous year, while remigration to Ukraine from Israel increased, the activists noted.

The meeting also addressed the problem of Ukrainian-Jewish relations, including the presentation of national awards to controversial Ukrainians such as Gen. Roman Shukhevich, politician Levko Lukyanenko and parliament member Ivan Spodarenko, as well as the glorifying of World War II nationalist combat units.

## **#1f**

### **Jews for Jesus angers Ukrainian Jews JTA brief, November 28, 2007**

Ukrainian Jews are protesting a concert held by Jews for Jesus in Dnepropetrovsk.

The concert took place on Nov. 24, the National Memorial Day of Holodomor, the 1932-33 famine that killed millions of Ukrainians. Jews for Jesus invited residents of the city to a "Jewish festive concert," posting informational posters throughout the city.

Jewish leaders in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine's third largest city with a population of 1.1 million, called the concert a provocation aimed at inciting interfaith and interethnic hatred.

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky, the chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk and the surrounding region, called the concert a blasphemy that desecrated the Sabbath for Jews as well as the memory of millions of Holodomor victims.

On Wednesday, Igor Kupeburg, the leader of Ukraine's League Magen, an organization working to counteract extensive missionary activity targeted at Jews in the former Soviet Union, told JTA that representatives of the same Jews for Jesus group had visited the main Kiev synagogue.

Kupeburg said that under the pretext of buying Chanukah candles, group members tried to distribute their leaflets inside the synagogue calling on Jews to accept Jesus as the messiah.

## **#1g**

### **Russia: Iran merits U.N. nod on nukes JTA brief, November 28, 2007**

Russia criticized the United Nations for its failure to recognize Iran's cooperation on its controversial nuclear program.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that Iran deserves credit for the work it already has done in providing information to the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency on its program, according to the state Interfax news agency.

"A constant refusal to acknowledge the positive steps taken by Iran in its contacts with the IAEA will reduce the chances of clearing up the issues directly," Lavrov told reporters.

Iran claims it is using the program to provide domestic energy, while a coalition of Western countries accuses it of developing nuclear weapons. A report by IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei earlier this month praised Iran for its cooperation and openness while noting that the Islamic Republic is still denying access to U.N. inspectors.

Israel and many Western critics charge that ElBaradei has ignored or downplayed the Iranian threat.

## **#1h**

### **Olmert: Russia next host? JTA brief, November 29, 2007**

Ehud Olmert said he did not know of plans by Russia to host the next Palestinian-Israeli peace parley.

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, was quoted by Interfax, the Russian news agency, as saying that participants attending this week's U.S.-convened conference restarting talks welcomed Russia's offer.

On Wednesday, Olmert told reporters he had met Lavrov during the conference and that such an offer never came up. "I don't know of any meeting in Moscow or any date or the agenda and therefore I can't really respond," he said at a summing up session.

A joint Israeli-Palestinian declaration coming out of the conference Tuesday in Annapolis, Md. made the United States the sole arbiter of progress in the process, cutting out Russians and Europeans from a role they had shared with the Americans since 2003.

#### **#1i**

#### **Oligarch Abramovich visits Moscow Chabad JTA brief, November 29, 2007**

Billionaire oligarch Roman Abramovich visited Chabad's new charity center in Moscow.

It has been known for some time that the notoriously media-shy Abramovich was a major donor to the Chabad-controlled Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, but generally he has avoided such public displays of his stewardship.

Abramovich, described on an FJC Web site as a "key patron of this center," toured the newly opened Shaarei Tzedek charity facility Tuesday alongside a chief rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar, and FJC board chairman Alexander Boroda.

The 41-year-old Jewish businessman and owner of Chelsea Football Club has a personal fortune estimated at approximately \$20 billion, much of which he carved out of the rush to privatization in the early 1990s that left the vast majority of Soviet state holdings in the hands of Kremlin-linked businessmen.

Abramovich reportedly met with recipients of the center's charitable facilities. No independent media were invited to the event.

#### **#2**

#### **Belarus to bar more than 100,000 people from leaving the country Associated Press , November 24, 2007**

More than 100,000 people - roughly one of every 100 citizens - will be barred from leaving Belarus after Jan. 1, the interior minister told journalists Saturday.

The list of those unable to travel abroad will include people who are serving suspended sentences, have access to state secrets, owe alimony or are otherwise in debt, Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov said.

"It is not possible to say the list will be short," he said. "More than 100,000 people will be on it."

Opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich expressed fears that the "black list" could be used to prevent opposition activists from maintaining contacts with Western politicians.

#### **#3**

#### **U.S., Lithuania in a spat over Jewish cemetery building New Europe Weekly, November 24, 2007**

Protesters of construction on land believed to be part of the largest Jewish cemetery in Vilnius picketed in July in front of the European Commission in Brussels

A reluctant authority might see Lithuania losing its closest mighty ally, the US, on a row circling a historic Jewish cemetery in this Baltic nation. Reports indicated that the US House of Representatives was considering a rebuke of Lithuania over construction atop the cemetery.

A congressional resolution, having the potential to upset bilateral relations between the United States and Lithuania, chastised the Lithuanian government for not stopping the building of luxury apartments. The Snipiskes Cemetery in Vilnius was built in the 16th century and closed in the 19th century. Developers built on a site adjacent to the burial ground prior to last year, but an international outcry led the government to form a commission to mark out the cemetery.

Construction began in February on a site that is likely to be above the cemetery, but the government did not issue a stop order until September, when much of the work was already done. "Today the construction continues and the fate of the remaining parcels, some of which are most certainly atop the cemetery, is unknown," wrote American Jewish Committee director Rabbi Andrew Baker in a letter supporting the resolution, cited in the local media. The letter reportedly charged the Lithuanian government with violating a 2002 bilateral agreement to preserve the cultural heritage of religious and ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, the daily newspaper *Lietuvos Zinios* reported that Lithuanian presidential adviser Vilius Kavaliauskas called the resolution "highly unpleasant and exaggerated in some places."

Lithuanian Ambassador Audrius Bruzga met with Rep. Mike Ferguson, who proposed the House resolution, and stressed that the issue was being addressed by the courts in Vilnius. The bill hitherto already had 50 co-sponsors and was soon to be added to the House's Foreign Affairs Committees calendar.

#### **#4**

#### **Second Day of Protests Against Putin in Russia**

**By Clifford J. Levy**

**New York Times, November 26, 2007**

MOSCOW — On a second day of rallies against President Vladimir V. Putin, riot police officers broke up a protest in St. Petersburg on Sunday, detaining numerous marchers, including two prominent politicians.

The unrest came a day after a similar event in Moscow ended with the arrest of Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion and opposition leader, whose coalition, Other Russia, has declared that Mr. Putin is turning Russia into a dictatorship. A judge sentenced Mr. Kasparov to five days in jail.

Similar demonstrations across Russia this weekend, a week before parliamentary elections, were either banned or squelched by the police.

With the economy strong and the nation stable after the turmoil of the 1990s, Mr. Putin is widely popular here, and Mr. Kasparov's movement has only a small following. Mr. Putin's party, United Russia, is expected to win an overwhelming majority in the elections, aided by the Kremlin's control over government agencies and the news media.

Still, the Kremlin is showing little tolerance for public opposition to the president. In addition to the police crackdowns, government television has all but ignored Other Russia.

On Sunday in St. Petersburg, Mr. Putin's hometown, reporters said riot police officers beat and manhandled scores of protesters as they tried to meet at Palace Square, in the city's heart. Mr. Kasparov's coalition said more than 300 people were detained, with most released later.

Among them were Boris Y. Nemtsov and Nikita Y. Belykh, leaders of the Union of Right Forces, a mainstream liberal party that had only recently joined Mr. Kasparov's coalition.

"They have forbidden us from discussing Putin," Mr. Nemtsov told marchers, according to Reuters. "But we have come here today to ask Mr. Putin and the authorities, why is there so much corruption in the country?"

Mr. Nemtsov was then detained by five officers as the crowd shouted, "Russia without Putin." He was later released. It was not immediately clear whether Mr. Belykh was released with him.

Mr. Nemtsov, a first deputy prime minister under President Boris N. Yeltsin, plans to run for president in March.

Mr. Putin is barred by the Constitution from running for a third consecutive term, and has pledged to abide by that rule, but has made it clear that he intends to continue to wield influence after the presidential election.

In Washington, Gordon D. Johndroe, a White House spokesman, expressed concern about "the aggressive tactics used by Russian authorities against opposition protesters" and called for Mr. Kasparov and other opposition leaders to be treated fairly, with access to lawyers.

## **#5**

### **The Net Tightens**

**If the Russian people love Vladimir Putin so much, why is he so afraid of them?**

**Editorial**

**Washington Post, November 26, 2007**

Vladimir Putin's propaganda machine likes to portray the Russian president as serenely confident, basking in the adoration of a grateful public that implores him to defy the constitution and serve another term as national leader. And by all rights, Russians should be cheerful. With oil prices booming, their economy is growing and prosperity is spreading from Moscow and St. Petersburg into the hinterland.

Yet how to square that image of serenity with the behavior of a petty and paranoid tyrant? Here are a few bulletins from the weekend before scheduled parliamentary elections: In Moscow, the chess genius turned opposition leader Garry Kasparov was arrested during a peaceful political rally and sentenced to five days in jail. A pro-Kremlin youth group supplied an amplified soundtrack of taped, cackling laughter during the event, and demonstrators, were beaten by police. In Nazran, Oleg Orlov, the head of Memorial, Russia's leading human rights organization, was kidnapped and beaten, along with three television journalists, apparently by law enforcement agents of some kind. Provincial authorities simply deny that anything at all happened. In nearby Daghestan, a leading opposition candidate, Farid Babayev of the Yabloko party, died after being shot in front of his apartment building. Yesterday, opposition candidates Boris Nemtsov, a former deputy prime minister, and Nikita Belykh were taken into custody, and police used batons against activists while breaking up a rally in St. Petersburg.

For nearly two decades now, the seal of good housekeeping for elections in post-Communist countries has been provided, or withheld, by election monitors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In Russia's Dec. 2 contest, for only the second time -- the first was in Albania in 1996 -- there will be no monitors. The Kremlin made it impossible for them to come by delaying invitations, withholding visas and the like. No wonder that, according to a recent poll by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, nearly two-thirds of Russians do not believe the election will be conducted honestly, and fewer than one-fifth believe the outcome will represent the will of the electorate.

The same poll, though, showed that a majority of Russians are optimistic about the future, which brings us back to the central mystery: Why does Mr. Putin feel he must govern by censor and by billy club?

**#6**

**Russian vote interests few Jews**

**By Matt Siegel**

**JTA, November 26, 2007**

A widespread sense of stability, the absence of significant anti-Semitism and a lack of viable alternatives to the party in power have coincided to produce the least important election for Russia's Jews since the fall of the Soviet Union.

MOSCOW (JTA) -- On Dec. 2, Russia's Jewish voters will turn out alongside their fellow countrymen to choose the configuration of the next Duma, the lower house of Russia's parliament.

If, that is, anybody cares.

A widespread sense of social and economic stability, the absence of significant anti-Semitism and a lack of viable alternatives to the party in power, United Russia, have coincided to produce what Jewish community insiders and analysts are calling the least important election for Jews here since the fall of the Soviet Union.

"Elections," laughed Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt when asked by JTA to comment about the upcoming vote. "What elections?"

In July 2005, Russia raised the threshold needed to secure seats in the Duma to 7 percent from 5 percent of votes, making it effectively impossible for small parties to win seats in the legislature. This has set the stage for sweeping electoral gains by parties sympathetic to President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin.

Critics have accused the government of using the measure to stifle opposition groups and limit political involvement, leading many to conclude that voting simply is not worth the effort.

While many have tuned out the elections, some held rallies across Russia this week to protest the Kremlin's tightening grip on power, at times clashing with riot police. One opposition leader, Garry Kasparov, the Jewish former chess champion and now leader of the Other Russia opposition group, was arrested after his party declared that Putin is turning the country into a dictatorship.

For Russians averse to authoritarian political movements, these elections are just one more example of the backward trend to the single-party politics of the Soviet era.

A high-ranking Jewish community member who declined to be named said there is a rising tide of anger at the withering political pluralism in Russia. As a result, some Jews have fled the country. Others have turned inward, embracing Orthodox Judaism as an outlet for their desire for change, the community leader said.

One positive consequence of the new election rules has been to sideline parties that appeal to anti-Semitic and xenophobic sentiments. They will find it virtually impossible to meet the minimum threshold for participation in the Duma.

"It's a case of the marginal groups in the political spectrum becoming more marginal," Goldschmidt said.

Asked if he would be voting, Vova from Irkutsk said, "Hopefully not, because there's nothing to choose from."

If Vova bothered to vote, the 33-year-old said he'd cast his ballot for SPS, an opposition group not expected to reach the 7 percent threshold.

Vova said the lack of choices at the ballot box might not be a bad thing.

"I think that Putin is probably one of the most liberal politicians. If people chose for themselves, they'd choose someone really crazy," he said, citing extremist politicians.

A Nov. 16 report by the Levada Center, an independent Russian polling and social research center, projected that of the seven parties running, only United Russia and the Communist Party of Russia will break the 7 percent threshold.

The poll put the Communists at 14 percent and the pro-Putin United Russia at 67 percent. Even Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, an ultranationalist mainstay that holds 35 seats in the current Duma, looks unlikely to make the minimum.

Political parties that openly espouse anti-Semitism have been a fixture of Russian electoral politics since the early 1990s. The sense of danger they created helped spur Jewish activism and involvement.

But this election has proven different.

Whether because opposition voices are being silenced or the government is truly committed to combating anti-Semitism, this campaign cycle has been uniquely lacking in vocal anti-Jewish sentiments.

Evgeney Satanovskiy, vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress, said these elections differ greatly from the past few in Russia.

In 1993 there nearly was a civil war, in 1996 there was a serious danger of a Communist victory and in 2000 it was a toss-up. But this time, Stanovskiy said, there's "more or less stability and predictability."

Perhaps more than anything else, this stability owes itself to Putin.

Following the chaos of the 1990s, which saw two economic collapses and the demise of Russia's extensive social safety net, the vast majority of Russian voters seem to be pleased with the relative prosperity of the Putin era. Under Putin, real wages and Russia's stock in foreign affairs both have risen.

"I think that people are happy with Putin because he's made their lives better," said Yulia, a 23-year-old student from northeastern Russia. "I don't think Russia cares about democracy. Should my mother care about free speech?"

Not everyone is happy, however.

Alexander, who works in Jewish education here, said he still hadn't decided whether or not to vote.

Watching the recent Israel-Russia soccer match at the Choral Synagogue, he appeared disgusted but resigned with the fate of Russian politics.

"Why vote?" he said. "It isn't going to change anything."

## **#7**

### **Putin persona dominates elections**

**By Paul Abelsky**

**JTA, November 27, 2007**

In a campaign devoid of much opposition, Russian political parties are vying for support by touting their association with the country's popular president, Vladimir Putin.

MOSCOW (JTA) -- With Russian parliamentary elections just around the corner, speculation about President Vladimir Putin's future has overshadowed a campaign marked by voter apathy.

The pro-Kremlin United Russia party, which Russians associate with the country's economic resurgence and return as a major international power player, is likely to make another dominant showing in the vote for the Duma.

In a campaign devoid of much opposition -- partly due to state controls -- political parties are vying for support by touting their association with the popular president. As Putin's favorite, United Russia has been pushing that message hard.

Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, a senior United Russia official, credited Putin for setting the national agenda and suggested that only United Russia could adhere to the strategic course established by the president.

"The party that will win the elections is the one able to set and dominate the agenda, and United Russia along with Putin succeeded in doing that," said Dmitry Badovsky, deputy director of the Moscow-based Research Institute of Social Systems. "Not a single party, with the partial exception of the Communists, has been able to formulate an appropriate response."

Putin is barred by the Russian constitution from remaining in office past presidential elections scheduled for next March, but few Russians believe Putin will depart the political stage.

In October, Putin agreed to head United Russia's party list for the Dec. 2 Duma vote, though he is not technically a party member.

Considering the party's accomplishments in recent years, Putin said he "agreed to lead United Russia despite all the misgivings and to urge the people to vote for the party so that it can form a majority in the state Duma."

The goal, according to Putin, is to achieve "unity between executive and legislative branches of power."

Putin has said he'd consider becoming prime minister, provided United Russia garners enough votes, but the premiership in Russia is relatively weak. Many analysts suggest Putin instead will take a constitutionally mandated recess from being president, then return in a future election.

Earlier this month the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe canceled plans to monitor the Duma elections, saying Russia's limitations on their monitors would have obstructed their mission. Among other limitations, Russia cut the number of visas issued to OSCE monitors to 70 from 400.

Putin blamed the OSCE for harboring a political agenda.

In the meantime, Putin's persona has dominated the Duma elections.

United Russia has embraced a vague mantra of "Putin's Plan" in place of any clear-cut political platform, and from the heart of Moscow to outlying regional towns, giant posters announce "Putin's Plan is a Victory for Russia," along with a small United Russia logo in the corner.

Representatives of United Russia have refused to take part in pre-electoral TV debates, saying the party has other means to "deliver information to the people."

Jews in Russia have reacted to the election not unlike their gentile counterparts: with general indifference.

"I'm not sure that anyone is interested in the Duma elections, either in the Jewish community or in the Russian population," said Russian Jewish Congress executive vice president Evgeniy Satanovsky.

"You basically have only two or three parties running which have any hope of getting seats within the Duma, and all of these parties are within, let's just call it the 'national consensus,' and they refrain from political

anti-Semitism,” said Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt. “So therefore, political anti-Semitism has been much less present during these elections than previous elections.”

The opposition has focused mostly on countering Putin’s influence -- with little apparent success.

Earlier this month, Russia’s Supreme Court rejected a case brought by one of several liberal parties allowed to run in the election, the Union of Right Forces, known as SPS, which argued that Putin should be barred from the parliamentary campaign because of the unfair advantage the head of state has to promote one party over another.

Putin has tried to walk a fine line between outright campaigning for United Russia and performing his presidential duties. He also has taken some pains not to identify too closely with United Russia. In televised remarks recently during a meeting with workers in Krasnoyarsk, Putin described the party as “lacking in steady ideological principles” and home to some opportunists.

His harsh assessment notwithstanding, Putin has left no doubt about his ultimate party of choice, leaving opposition groups demoralized and scrambling for attention.

Furthermore, a 2-year-old rule that raised the threshold needed to secure seats in the Duma to 7 percent from 5 percent of votes has made it nearly impossible for small parties to win any seats.

Polls show United Russia picking up about 60 percent of the vote, with the Communists placing a distant second with 9 percent.

Those are the only parties seemingly assured of passing the minimal 7 percent threshold.

The stridently nationalistic Liberal Democratic Party, led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who has made anti-Semitic remarks about Jews ruining Russia, is hovering around 7 percent. The other 11 parties competing in the campaign register support in the low single digits.

As a result of their increasing marginalization, several small parties have ramped up their rhetoric in recent weeks and taken a more radical approach.

Two opposition parties marched over the weekend in Moscow and St. Petersburg, with supporters clashing with police and party leaders detained or arrested.

The Communist Party also has challenged authorities, in one case demanding that state-owned TV retract unfair statements made in a recent program.

Pro-Putin voters who don’t find United Russia’s endorsement of Putin enthusiastic enough can join the newly formed For Putin public movement, which assembled more than 700 delegates recently in the city of Tver to urge the president to stay past the end of his term.

Headed by lawyer and TV personality Pavel Astakhov, the group has tried to formulate an extra constitutional role for Putin as the “national leader” -- something between president for life and czar.

One group, Women of Vladivostok, sent a petition to Putin’s wife, Lyudmila, exhorting her to run in the presidential elections next March.

**#8**

**Russian elections lack anti-Semitism**

**By Matt Siegel**

**JTA, November 27, 2007**

Anti-Semitism has virtually disappeared from Russian politics, even among the country's ultra-right groups.

MOSCOW (JTA) -- Spoken by anyone else, Alexander Belov's words would have been unremarkable.

"As far as I know, and I can trace my descendants several centuries back, I have nothing to do with Jews," he said, adding, "which is neither positive or negative."

But Belov is far from a simple man on the street. The charismatic and media savvy leader of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, or DPNI, heads what is by many accounts the most powerful ultranationalist movement operating in Russia today.

His Jewish-neutral comments to JTA almost certainly represent a calculated consideration. What that calculation by Belov and others on the ultra-right represents, though, is revolutionary.

Anti-Semitism, once at the forefront of Russian nationalism and electoral politics, has ceased to be a viable political tool and virtually has disappeared from the national stage.

"Not too long ago, the Duma was not willing to condemn anti-Semitism because it was politically expedient not to," said Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, who was in Moscow earlier this month for meetings with the Putin government.

"That's changed. You have an election now which, for the first time in recent history, there are no issues about who's a Jew or who's supported by a Jew."

Russians will go to the polls Dec. 2 to elect a new legislature. Next year they are slated to vote for a new president.

Post-Soviet politics is rife with attempts to manipulate deeply entrenched anti-Semitism for electoral gains. During the tumultuous decade following the collapse of the USSR, numerous political parties ran and made significant gains by employing crass anti-Semitic imagery. Indeed, the first major grassroots movement of the post-Soviet era, Pamyat, was heavily anti-Semitic.

In 1993 Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, although himself part Jewish, was a member of Pamyat and won 23 percent of the seats in the Russian Duma.

"Political anti-Semitism was much, much more vocal than today," said the chief rabbi of Moscow, Pinchas Goldschmidt.

Even as recently as January 2005, when 19 Duma deputies introduced a bill proposing to ban Judaism as "satanic," accusing Jews of engaging in ritualistic murder, anti-Semitism remained at least a nominally acceptable tool among both the mainstream and fringe.

It is not clear whether the situation has changed due to changing public perception or genuine contrition.

Experts cite the personal involvement of President Vladimir Putin and his commitment to combat anti-Semitism as one factor in the decline of popular anti-Semitism. But many believe the real reason is that the political center and ultra-right have found a more palatable enemy: westerners and immigrants, many of them Muslims from the Caucasus.

"Maybe because of the Chechen wars, maybe because of some other changes," nationalists "are more focused on practical enemies," said Alexander Verkhovsky, executive director of the Sova Center, which monitors hate crimes in Russia.

Jews are not needed in this scenario, he said, "because it's difficult to put a finger on them. People don't understand what's the practical harm."

As is often the case, however, political trends do not always mirror reality on the street.

Although reliable statistics from the 1990s are difficult to come by, Verkhovsky believes that the number of anti-Semitic attacks in the last seven years have remained relatively static, despite a small bump this year.

And while anti-Semitism may have mostly disappeared from the television set, Duma floor and even the public meetings held by the ultra-right, it remains at the core of neo-fascist ideology.

Verkhovsky said that some years ago, he tried to find Russian nationalists who avoided anti-Semitism entirely. He said he "found several of them who really tried, but it was nearly impossible because the core idea of a secret plot against Russia" has to include "some participants of this plot."

Belov himself, despite his pronouncements of religious tolerance to JTA, seems to understand its potency as well as anyone.

Born Alexander Potkin, he changed his name to Belov, taken from the Russian word for "white," after breaking with Pamyat some years ago. Since then he has been unable to shake the rumor that he is Jewish. Many Russian Jewish surnames end in "kin," and the question has sparked Internet chatter that still persists.

A recent search on Stormfront.org, a worldwide neo-Nazi chat board, revealed pages of commentary and speculation in both English and Russian as to Belov/Potkin's ancestry, and whether it disqualified him from leading the Russian ultranationalists.

"I wouldn't be linking to videos of the DPNI," wrote a user calling himself Paladin89. "It's leader is a Jew, Potkin, who changed his name to Belov which means white/of white! The sad thing is that many Russians on this board know this yet they still follow a chosenite!"

Belov continues to maintain he is not Jewish.

Still, anti-Semitism remains too tempting to pass up in certain cases, even for those with mainstream political aspirations like Belov. Verkhovsky described anti-Semitism as being central to the identity of the Russian ultra-right.

Some weeks after his conversation with JTA, during this year's "Russian March," a large annual demonstration uniting groups as seemingly disparate as the National Socialist Party and his DPNI, Belov made anti-Semitic remarks to much applause.

"We came here to say simple words: We are sick and tired of the power of occupants, of conquerors, and now it's enough," Belov was quoted as saying by The Associated Press. "We are the real power, not those who are hiding in this Torah!"

In a follow-up interview, Belov insisted that the DPNI is not anti-Semitic, attributing the spontaneous chants of "Death to the Jews" that were reported by AP as the work of fringe elements in the crowd.

"At the event, after every orator, every speech, people were shouting 'Death to the Jews' -- also during my own speech," he said. "I didn't mention Jews or anything to do with them. As concerns this factor in any society, even in Israel, there are people who behave too extravagantly."

#9

## Georgia on his mind

By Lily Galili

Haaretz, November 27, 2007

One day in June 1995, Lasha Zhvania, an official at the Georgian Foreign Ministry's Israel desk, was reviewing the reports he had received about former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze's visit to Israel. One passage in particular piqued his interest. It was a transcript of a conversation in which Shevardnadze warned then-Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin that the path he had chosen was dangerous, both for him and for his government. Rabin responded that a leader is just like a bus driver. He can't look backward and listen to the passengers' complaints; he must grasp the wheel and keep his eye on the road.

This week, Zhvania, now Georgia's ambassador to Israel, recalled that conversation, albeit in a different context. Last Friday, the Georgian embassy marked the fourth anniversary of the country's Rose Revolution, which ended Shevardnadze's rule and brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power. The revolution was undertaken with both determination and sensitivity. Its unfolding sparked the West's imagination, just like the new president, then a 35-year-old politician, who had earned his degree at Columbia University. This year, the revolution's anniversary was celebrated on the same day Saakashvili was legally required to resign his post, in order to run in the presidential elections, which have been moved up to January 5.

### Electricity and old age

In early November, Saakashvili announced early elections, in response to the mass demonstrations recurring on Tbilisi's main street, which were quelled with considerable force and only served to reinforce the president's anti-democratic image, both inside Georgia and abroad. Saakashvili declared a state of national emergency and as a result all media outlets, apart from the state-run television, were closed for a few days. They were eventually allowed to operate again, thanks to pressure from within the country and from the international community.

Until the announcement of early elections, Georgian political analysts and political scientists thought the country was sliding toward civil war. They believe the announcement prevented it. "It's Saakashvili at his best," said Giorgi Margvelashvili, a political scientist from Tbilisi University. Now even the president's opponents believe he will emerge victorious, despite, and perhaps even because of, the fact that seven candidates from the divided opposition are running against him. It appears that the Georgian Jewish oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili is among them. Patarkatsishvili is considered one of the backers of the opposition's demonstrations.

"In my view, the future still resembles what I envisioned back then," insists Zhvania, 34, a member of the generation that led the Rose Revolution. His contemporaries took over Georgia's government and most of the country's positions of power when they were below the age of 30. At the time, their advantage was their lack of experience with the Soviet method; their disadvantage today is their lack of practical experience in leadership and governance. But Zhvania maintains that in the current reality inexperience is a marginal factor. To him, the core of the problem consists of the accelerated economic reforms, which harmed too many people.

"We decided on aggressive liberalization," he says. "We didn't pay enough attention to the social crises. On the one hand, we brought investors; but on the other hand, we weren't sensitive enough. Until four years ago, we lived in a country that didn't have electricity. By 2007, we had resolved all the energy problems. There is electricity in the rural areas as well; even in the mountains on the Russian border, people point to the pipes transporting gas to their homes and to the cellular antennas. However, I understand that it's impossible to feed people with pipes and antennas. If there isn't enough employment in the public sector, it is necessary to create jobs in the private sector."

Zhvania is referring to the 40,000 policemen who were dismissed in one single day from the police force, which he calls "corrupt." As a result of the layoff, their families became hostile to the government. Zhvania also includes those who were dismissed from the sullied bureaucracy and relates that while 118 different permits were once needed to open a business, today only eight are required.

"There is also a psychological aspect to this story," he says. "If you ask a Georgian taxi driver about the job situation, he will tell you he is unemployed. During the Soviet era, employment was entirely dependent on the government and any work outside the government sector was not considered work. It's no longer like that for the young people, but this perception has become entrenched among the older generation." This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to estimate Georgia's unemployment rate - a rough estimate has it as at least 20 percent.

There are some similarities between Israel and Georgia. Both peoples believe that God Himself, in all His glory, chose for them the strip of land where they live. Both nations feel they are superior to their neighbors and that they deserve much more. Despite the huge gap between the standard of living in Israel and in Georgia, many Israelis are familiar with the experiences of liberalization and accelerated privatization, which leave victims in their wake.

For Israelis, the old woman in the hospital corridor has become a symbol of social collapse - in Georgia it is the old woman with the electricity bill. Not long ago, one such woman knocked on the door of a government office and demanded to meet with the minister to find out why her electricity bill is so high. "First she cried that there was no electricity, now she's crying over the bill," complained the guard who prevented her from entering.

A mouse vs. an elephant

In Georgia, internal shakeups are never purely domestic matters. Its geopolitical location, and the growing tensions with neighboring Russia, not to mention the separatist movements (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia), turn any disturbance into a regional issue. This reality is especially important at a time when Georgia is making its way into NATO, with the West's support and much to Russia's dismay.

Zhvania is convinced that the recent demonstrations in Tbilisi were in part initiated by the neighboring superpower. To back his claim, he quotes Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who on the day of the big demonstration said that "Georgia deserves a better life and a better leadership." And how did Georgia respond to this statement? "Not with words of thanks," Zhvania replies diplomatically.

The tension predates the election of the pro-American Saakashvili to the post of president, when two men were apprehended before they were able to assassinate him. The captives admitted that they were being operated by the Russian secret service. The Georgians, for their part, looked around and decided they did not want a slave-master relationship with their large neighbor, like several other countries around them. Still, this episode does not necessarily justify provocations by Georgia, mostly verbal ones. As such, Saakashvili has referred to Vladimir Putin as "a short guy" and a minister upset about the Russian embargo of Georgian wine imports publicly stated that the "Russians are capable of drinking urine, too."

When asked whether such remarks don't reek of revolutionary euphoria and are a sign of the young leaders' political-diplomatic inexperience, Zhvania is silent, then laughs and only afterward answers: "No one's perfect. It's just like the story about the elephant that breaks all the dishes in the little mouse's kitchen. The mouse controls itself for a long time, but in the end it gets angry and shouts. In response, the elephant complains that the mouse is to blame because it's shouting. So we're shouting, sometimes using harsh words and loudly, against what Russia is doing to us in an attempt to thwart our entry into NATO. The noise we're making is also a call for help from the international community."

Zhvania is convinced that the old Soviet Union is not dead. "Their regional ambitions have not ended, and they must be finished off once and for all," he says; "proof for this can be found in Putin's speech last week. As far as we are concerned, Russia must decide if it wants to have an uneasy neighbor, or a stable

neighbor with a thriving economy." Can Georgia's shouts and occasional provocations evolve into a regional war? "No," responds Zhvania. "We are young, but we are aware of reality. While the mouse is indeed angry, it cannot declare war against the elephant."

## **#10**

### **Putin Accuses U.S. of Trying to Discredit Russian Vote**

**By Clifford J. Levy**

**New York Times, November 27, 2007**

MOSCOW — President Vladimir V. Putin on Monday accused the United States of trying to taint the legitimacy of next week's Russian parliamentary elections by pressing a group of prominent independent election observers to abandon efforts to monitor the campaign.

Mr. Putin contended that the monitors, who are deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, had halted plans to appraise the parliamentary balloting at the urging of the State Department in Washington.

Mr. Putin's statements in recent weeks have taken on an increasingly nationalistic tone as he has sought to muster support for his party in the elections on Sunday. Speaking to reporters on Monday in St. Petersburg, he once again criticized what he suggested was foreign meddling in Russia's affairs.

"According to information we have, it was again done at the recommendation of the U.S. State Department, and we will take this into account in our interstate relations with this country," he said. "Their goal is the delegitimization of the elections. But they will not achieve even this goal."

If Russia maintains a robust military, Mr. Putin later added, "we will not allow anyone to poke their snotty nose into our affairs."

American diplomats said they had no role in the cancellation of the election-monitoring mission, and the monitoring group called Mr. Putin's assertion "nonsense."

On the same day Mr. Putin made his comments, the White House took the unusual step of issuing a statement saying that President Bush was "deeply concerned" about the detention of several opposition leaders in Russia.

Over the weekend, the opposition coalition led by Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion, held rallies and marches that were broken up by riot police officers in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities, with hundreds of people taken into custody. Most were later released.

Mr. Kasparov himself was arrested in Moscow on Saturday when he tried to deliver a letter to the election authorities assailing the conduct of the election, and was sentenced to five days in jail. His movement, Other Russia, says Mr. Putin is creating a Soviet-style dictatorship in Russia.

Mr. Putin has turned the parliamentary elections into a referendum on his leadership, and he has been stepping up his campaigning for his party, United Russia. In a major speech last week, he called his opponents tools of foreign governments, likening them to jackals who hang around foreign embassies to obtain money.

At the same time, the Kremlin has used its control over the election laws, government agencies and the news media to ensure that the opposition has little if any chance of gaining a foothold in the next Parliament.

Mr. Putin, who has high approval ratings in Russia, is barred by the Constitution from seeking a third consecutive term in the presidential elections in March. But he has said he intends to continue to wield influence after he leaves office.

The election-monitoring arm, called the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, announced on Nov. 16 that it was ending the mission, saying that restrictions imposed by the Russian government had made it impossible for it to carry out its work.

Russian election officials had first delayed issuing visas to the monitors, not giving them enough time to make their customary observations of campaigning around the country and of news coverage. The officials then abruptly said they would limit the size of the mission to only 70 people, down from 400 in the parliamentary elections in 2003.

In contending that the State Department had a role in the cancellation of the mission, Mr. Putin on Monday was highlighting an accusation first made last week by Russian election officials.

The chairman of the Central Election Commission in Russia, Vladimir Y. Churov, who was appointed with Mr. Putin's support, said the director of the election-monitoring office, Christian Strohal of Austria, visited Washington shortly before the decision to withdraw was announced.

Mr. Strohal's aides said the timing of the visit and the decision was coincidental. He met with the American diplomats only because he happened to be in Washington for a meeting of the Organization of American States, they said.

Daniel Fried, an assistant secretary of state, said he and R. Nicholas Burns, under secretary of state for political affairs, had indeed discussed the Russian elections with Mr. Strohal. But Mr. Fried emphasized in an interview that they told Mr. Strohal that they were not trying to affect the process and that it was up to the group to come to its own conclusions about whether the mission could go forward.

"They had to make an independent judgment," Mr. Fried said. "This is not about United States-Russia relations. It is about Russia's democratic development."

Urdur Gunnarsdottir, a spokeswoman for the monitoring office, also said Mr. Putin was mistaken.

"This was a decision that was simply based on the fact that we were not receiving any visas and time had run out," she said. "The only consultation that took place was within our office with the people that plan these observation missions and carry them through. They have 150 observation missions under their belt. They know by now what needs to be in place to do this."

The monitoring office has observed every election in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its presence was viewed as an effort by Moscow to ensure that elections complied with international standards.

But the Kremlin has in recent years chafed at the group's reports, contending that they were biased against the government. After the 2004 presidential elections, which Mr. Putin won in a landslide, the group stated that the campaign had not been conducted fairly. In recent months, Russian officials have maintained that the monitoring group needs to be reformed.

## **#11**

### **U.S. and Russia face off over elections at OSCE meet**

**By Jason Webb**

**Reuters, November 28, 2007**

MADRID - A dispute between the United States and Russia over election monitoring threatens to overshadow a meeting of Europe's main human rights and security watchdog starting on Thursday.

There were still hopes the ministerial meeting of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to take place in Madrid would reach a deal on assisting Afghanistan in policing its borders.

And the United States was also trying for an agreement to keep Russia within the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty which eased the transition to a new balance of forces after the end of the Cold War.

But the United States said it would not budge in its opposition to Russian attempts to reform the OSCE's electoral monitoring arm, ODIHR.

"ODIHR's independence needs to be respected," U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns told a news conference in Madrid on Wednesday. The United States would not concede "a millimeter" in its defense, he said.

The spat has been further embittered by ODIHR's decision not to monitor Russia's parliamentary elections on December 2, which are expected to provide evidence of President Vladimir Putin's continuing grip on power.

The United States says Moscow imposed impossible conditions on ODIHR. But Putin has snapped back against foreigners who he says are "poking their snotty noses" into its affairs.

While meetings between U.S. and Russian officials are set to go ahead, Burns indicated the dispute could rebound on the Russian-backed application by Kazakhstan to chair the OSCE in 2009.

But Burns said the United States had still to decide about Kazakhstan, a major emerging exporter of oil and gas which he described as a "friendly government to the United States."

The United States and Britain have expressed reservations about Kazakhstan's suitability to lead the OSCE, with its focus on human rights and democracy. Its president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has the right to remain in office for life and his party won all the seats in a parliamentary poll in August.

The United States is also seeking to extend the OSCE mission in Kosovo.

Talks involving the major powers in Vienna failed on Wednesday to reach an agreement about the province whose Albanian majority is preparing to declare independence from Serbia. Russia opposes Kosovan independence, which the West sees as inevitable.

"One of the other issues that we have to grapple with at this ministerial is the future of the OSCE mission in Kosovo which the United States will support unreservedly because we see how important it is now and under any transitional scenario it will be ... important a year from now," Burns said.

Burns said he was still trying for agreement on the CFE.

"It's been very unfortunate to see Russia threaten to walk out unilaterally from the CFE treaty. We think Russia should come back and come to Madrid in a spirit of compromise to look at the American and allied proposals on an objective basis and to see if we can work out a way forward," Burns said.

Diplomats said a more straightforward issue on which the meeting should be able to reach agreement is on providing training and help for Afghanistan to patrol effectively its borders.

**#12**

## **Unmasking President Putin's Grandiose Myth**

**By Anders Aslund**

**Moscow Times, November 28, 2007**

Most political leaders are mediocre, a few are heroes and some are just plain lucky.

In Russia, many see President Vladimir Putin as a hero -- an authoritarian reformer who has brought economic growth and stability to Russia. But let's scrutinize his record a little closer. Russia's outstanding achievement is that its gross domestic product has increased six fold from \$200 billion in 1999 to \$1.2 trillion this year, but this is primarily a result of the market reforms undertaken in the 1990s.

The real growth rate is not outstanding. The whole Eurasian region ranging from China to the Baltics has been growing at rates from 7 percent to 11 percent annually since 2000, but Russia's growth rate has only been 6.7 percent. In spite of its abundance of oil and gas, it ranks 9th among the 15 former Soviet republics in growth for this period. The reason is that Russia is lagging behind in most reforms.

Financial stabilization remains incomplete. Last year, inflation stopped at 9 percent, but it is rising. Before the State Duma elections, the government has abandoned macroeconomic caution. Although inflation is rising, the government is sharply increasing public spending. At the same time, it has imposed informal price controls on gasoline and food, and this has caused some shortages. In this way, detrimental Soviet economic thinking has been revived.

What political stability is possible when nobody knows anything about Russia's political future after March 2008? In his speech on Nov. 21, Putin said, "In the next several months, a complete renewal of Russia's highest state power will take place," but he refuses to explain what he meant, thus leaving the country in complete uncertainty. He also has not explained what the well-advertised "Putin's Plan" is.

Putin has built a personal authoritarian system in which he makes all major decisions himself. This overcentralization of power leaves the decision makers poorly informed about everything they decide, and the government-controlled media has suffocated all policy debate. As a result, fear is rising with the steadily increasing repression.

As a consequence, central decisions are few and of poor quality. During his second term, Putin has undertaken virtually no economic reforms, and therefore has not contributed to economic growth. His entire endeavor has been to reinforce authoritarianism and to let his KGB friends from St. Petersburg indulge in lawless renationalization and larceny that has impeded investment and production, especially in energy.

Personal authoritarian systems are not very stable because they depend entirely upon one ruler. If he leaves office, such a system usually collapses. Since Putin has conscientiously undermined many state institutions, he has obviously intended to stay on all along.

This system has no other legitimacy than economic growth. Fortunately, Putin has not developed any ideology, even if he toys with Russian nationalism. Nor does he have any party. After all, United Russia is only a bunch of state bureaucrats. It is interesting that Putin's big Moscow speech on Nov. 21 managed to mobilize only 5,000 supporters. When the regime fails to deliver steady high economic growth, it is likely to be frail even while maintaining a policy of repression.

Everybody around Putin is completely corrupt, but many think that the president himself is honest. In February 2004, presidential candidate Ivan Rybkin named three men as Putin's bagmen, including Gennady Timchenko, the co-founder of the Gunvor oil-trading company. After Rybkin made this statement, he vanished from the political stage. In September, the Polish magazine Wprost wrote that Timchenko, a former KGB officer and member of Putin's dacha cooperative in St. Petersburg, has a net worth of \$20 billion. Officially, Timchenko sells the oil of four Russian oil companies, but how are the prices determined to generate such profits?

In a sensational interview in Germany's Die Welt on Nov. 12, Stanislav Belkovsky, the well-connected insider who initiated the Kremlin campaign against Yukos in 2003, made specific claims about Putin's wealth. He alleged that Putin owned 37 percent of Surgutneftegaz (worth \$18 billion), 4.5 percent of Gazprom (\$13 billion) and half of Timchenko's company, Gunvor (possibly \$10 billion). If this information is true, Putin's total personal fortune would amount to no less than \$41 billion, placing him among the 10 richest in the world.

These shareholdings have been rumored for years, but now a prominent international newspaper has published such allegations made by a well-informed source. If these numbers contain any truth, Putin would be the most corrupt political leader in world history, easily surpassing Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and Zaire's Mobutu.

Last year, a private arbitration tribunal in Zurich, Switzerland, ruled that Putin's close St. Petersburg friend from his days in foreign intelligence, IT and Telecommunications Minister Leonid Reiman, is the beneficiary of telecommunications assets presently valued at \$6 billion. Putin's only reaction was to block this information in Russian media.

Both the World Bank and Transparency International assess that corruption in Russia has increased after 2004, while it has declined in most post-Soviet countries. Recently, a few senior officials have been arrested for organized crime, but this has nothing to do with the actual fight against corruption. The common view is that these arrests are only part of a turf war among Putin's KGB men from St. Petersburg.

Nor has Putin brought some law and order to Russia, according to an excellent analysis by Brian Taylor of Syracuse University. Despite sharply rising expenditures on law enforcement, the average annual murder rate under Putin has been higher than under Yeltsin. According to Taylor's report, no country outside of Iraq and Afghanistan has suffered so many terrorist attacks as Russia (even outside of Chechnya) after Sept. 11.

The final claim of Putin's supporters is that he is re-establishing Russia on the world stage and restoring its military, but even that is not true. Military reform has stopped, and hundreds of conscripts are driven to suicide every year because they are exploited as slave labor. Military procurements and wish lists focus on the priorities of the Cold War in the 1970s -- intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers -- rather than new smart weapons for contemporary military needs.

My verdict is that Putin has had tremendous luck, which he has utilized to build up an anachronistic authoritarian reign. One could draw a historical parallel between Putin and Tsar Nicholas I, who ruled from 1825 to 1855 to the benefit of nobody except his own close circle. Abundant oil revenues have made it possible for Putin to avoid difficult reforms and to allow his inner circle to indulge in some of the worst corruption the world has ever seen.

*Anders Aslund, a senior fellow of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, is author of the recently published book "Russia's Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed."*

## **#13**

### **Pro-Western Coalition Formed in Ukraine**

**By Yana Sedova**

**Associated Press, November 29, 2007**

KIEV, Ukraine — Ukraine's two pro-Western parties forged a fragile majority coalition in parliament Thursday, raising hopes for an end to months of political turmoil.

But the coalition agreement that the parties registered at parliament could fall victim to the squabbling and flexible loyalties that characterize Ukrainian politics.

Hours after the parties of President Viktor Yushchenko and Orange Revolution heroine Yulia Tymoshenko reached the coalition agreement, a senior member of Yushchenko's party announced he had refused to sign it — giving the coalition 227 seats in the Verkhovna Rada, just one more than is needed for a majority.

The agreement stipulates that Tymoshenko would return as prime minister, while Yushchenko's party gets to pick the parliament speaker. Lawmakers now have one month to form a Cabinet.

Tymoshenko is one of the most polarizing figures in Ukraine — adored by her supporters, but regarded with suspicion even by other Western-oriented politicians and despised by backers of Viktor Yanukovich, the current, Moscow-oriented prime minister.

She was the most energetic and visible figure of the 2004 Orange Revolution, the massive protests that arose after Yanukovich appeared to beat Yushchenko in a fraud-plagued presidential election.

Yushchenko won a court-ordered rerun of the election and made Tymoshenko his prime minister, only to fire her seven months later.

Yanukovich became prime minister last year after his Party of Regions won the largest share of votes in a parliamentary election. This spring, Yushchenko accused Yanukovich of attempting an illegal power grab and ordered new elections, which were held in September.

Yanukovich's party got the largest number of votes, but not enough to overcome the combined seats won by Yushchenko's and Tymoshenko's parties.

Raisa Bohatryova, a senior member of Yanukovich's party, said its deputies would not support any of the Orange coalition's proposals.

With the Party of Regions moving into fierce opposition and with the Orange coalition having only a paper thin majority, politicians and observers said it was highly unstable.

"The question of the new government and of Tymoshenko being premier is far from decided," said political analyst Ivan Losovy. "It is the first and good step, but there is not 100 percent guarantee that a government will be formed."

Yushchenko has publicly thrown his support behind Tymoshenko as premier, but he may be reluctant to invest too much power in her because she is a potential rival for the presidency in 2009.

## **#14**

### **Russia's Election Is for Parliament, but the Real Vote Is on Putin**

**By Clifford J. Levy**

**New York Times, November 29, 2007**

MOSCOW — His valor is extolled on billboards across the nation, and his daily feats dominate the television news. At a keynote election speech last week, his handlers even showcased a shimmying girl band singing an ode to that heartthrob in the Kremlin: "I want a man like Putin, full of strength!"

Thousands of candidates are vying on Sunday for seats in the next Parliament, but the election is really about only one politician, President Vladimir V. Putin. After steadily securing control over Russia since taking office in 2000, Mr. Putin has transformed the election into a vote of confidence on his leadership and on the nation's economic recovery, and he is throwing the full weight of his government and party machine into the fight.

But to many in the opposition, the fight does not seem entirely fair.

Opposition parties have been all but suffocated by strict new election laws, scant television coverage, curbs on their ability to organize and criminal inquiries. Workers at government agencies and companies that receive state financing said they were being exhorted by their bosses to pull the lever for Mr. Putin's party, United Russia.

A professor in Siberia named Dmitri Voronin, for example, said in an interview today that he and others at his university had been repeatedly called in by administrators and told that if they did not vote for United Russia, they would be dismissed.

An overwhelming victory for United Russia, which is all but assured, could embolden Mr. Putin to maintain power over the government after he formally leaves office next year. Mr. Putin cannot run for a third consecutive term, according to the Russian constitution, and he has vowed to abide by that rule. But he has also said he will continue to exert influence over Russia after the presidential election in March.

Whomever Mr. Putin endorses is most likely to become president, but he has not indicated a preference. Aides said he had recorded a major speech to be delivered to the nation on Thursday, but it was not known whether he would discuss succession.

To make the case that Mr. Putin has rescued Russia after the crises of the 1990s, the Kremlin has relied upon the kind of sophisticated political imagery seen in American campaigns. Mr. Putin's speech last week occurred at a rally that had the trappings of a political convention at Madison Square Garden, with Mr. Putin shaking the hands of the faithful as he walked through the arena, just as American presidential candidates do.

"Together, my friends, we have already done so much," he told the crowd at the Luzhniki arena in Moscow. "We have strengthened the sovereignty and revived the integrity of Russia. We have revived the power of law and the supremacy of the constitution"

At the same time, the party has deployed stylish television commercials that make the ones put together by its opponents seem like high school productions.

The advertisements often appeal to Russian patriotism, drawing an implicit contrast between the country's current success, which has been spurred by the high price of oil, and the failings of the years after the fall of the Soviet Union, which were scarred by economic collapse, crime and political chaos.

"Today we are successful in politics, economics, arts, sciences, sports," says the announcer in one advertisement to a stirring brass accompaniment and images of Mr. Putin and other smiling Russians. "We have reasons for pride. We enjoy respect and deference. We are citizens of a great country, and we have great victories ahead. Putin's plan is a victory for Russia!"

Mr. Putin has high approval ratings, and it is clear that for some Russians, the nation's stability and the sense of authority that he projects are more important than the ideal of having an active opposition.

But Mr. Putin's opponents contend that he is popular only because he has prevented the airing of criticism of his policies.

Prosecutors confiscated more than 15 million campaign newsletters, calendars and fliers from the Union of Right Forces, one of the mainstream liberal parties that has come under regular harassment. In some cities, leaflets were anonymously distributed saying that the party was employing people with AIDS as canvassers.

Nikita Y. Belykh, a party leader, said he could not recall the last time that the party was covered by the main television news programs positively. Mr. Belykh was briefly detained by the police last weekend during protests conducted by an opposition coalition, Other Russia, that is led by Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion. Mr. Kasparov was arrested and sentenced to five days in jail.

“United Russia, through all the mechanisms at its disposal, does not allow other political parties to enter the political landscape,” Mr. Belykh said.

He added that the party had received numerous reports from around the country of people being threatened with retribution if they did not vote for United Russia.

That was the experience of Mr. Voronin, the professor in Siberia, who lives in Prokopyevsk, 2,000 miles east of Moscow. Speaking by phone, Mr. Voronin said local United Russia officials had guaranteed party leaders that they would receive 80 percent of the vote in the region.

“They periodically summon directors of the local branches of the universities, directors of technical schools, specialized schools, head doctors of clinics and hospitals and give them instructions on how to vote,” Mr. Voronin said. “They also call together different categories of voters — for instance, young people who are going to vote for the first time — and explain to them how they should do it ‘correctly.’”

Nonpartisan groups that are monitoring the campaign, like Golos, a watchdog group in Moscow, said such complaints were common. The most prominent international election monitors have pulled out of Russia, saying that they were thwarted by Russian officials. But Vladimir Y. Churov, an ally of Mr. Putin who is chairman of the Central Election Commission, told reporters on Tuesday night that he did not believe such accusations. Mr. Putin himself said on Wednesday that he had no doubt that the election would be fair.

“We know the value of authentic democracy and are interested in conducting honest, maximally transparent and open elections without organizational shortcomings and malfunctions,” Mr. Putin said. “We are sure that this will be done.”

## **#15**

### **The Kremlin will triumph in Russia's parliamentary elections, but where will it lead? Associated Press, November 29, 2007**

MOSCOW - Russians vote Sunday in the fifth parliamentary elections in their country's post-Soviet history, a contest the Kremlin calls evidence of Russia's political maturity, but critics say will accelerate President Vladimir Putin's relentless retreat from democratic reform.

The election is expected to sweep all of the Kremlin's liberal democratic opponents out of the legislature. It will almost certainly cement the dominance of a single party, United Russia, for at least the next four years. And it will allow Putin to claim a mandate from the Russian voters to remain the country's leader, even though under the constitution he is ineligible to seek re-election.

Polls predict Putin's party could win two-thirds of the popular vote and 80 percent of the 450 seats in the legislature. A smattering of seats, meanwhile, may go to the Communists, the ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and, perhaps, a left-leaning party also led by Kremlin loyalists.

All but the Communists would be expected to vote in lockstep with the Kremlin.

If anything, though, the polls may underestimate the scale of United Russia's expected victory.

The Kremlin has mounted an extraordinary effort to pressure Russians to vote — and to ensure they choose the party list of United Russia, headed by Putin himself. Many opposition groups have denounced that effort, saying the Kremlin's allies are using coercive or repressive tactics to ensure United Russia wins in a landslide.

For supporters of the Kremlin, a runaway victory for United Russia would mark a victory for stability and order, and vindicate Putin's nearly eight-year effort to build a powerful central government at the expense of regional governments, the courts, parliament, the media and other nominally independent institutions.

The Kremlin's foes say the vote will signal the triumph of Russia's powerful bureaucracy and the so-called "siloviki," veterans of the intelligence and military services who have been appointed to key government posts by Putin, himself a former mid-ranking KGB officer. In the long run, they argue, a victory for Putin will weaken Russia and further divide it from the West.

Most expect the vote to help settle the most urgent political question facing Russia, the crisis of succession to the Russian presidency.

The larger the turnout and the bigger the victory for United Russia in Sunday's elections, most analysts here agree, the easier it will be for Putin to claim the right to lead Russia after his current presidential term ends.

The 55-year-old incumbent appears to be in good health and is overwhelmingly popular, with approval ratings consistently above 80 percent in recent months. But Putin is prevented by the constitution from seeking a third consecutive term in the March 2 elections.

While polls show most Russians would support changing the constitution to permit Putin to run again and many have begged him to do so, he has repeatedly promised to step down.

Putin explained his reluctance to run again in an October 2005 interview with journalists from the Netherlands.

While conceding he was concerned his successor might falter, he said: "If each successive head of state were to change the constitution to suit them, we would soon find ourselves without a state at all."

But Masha Lipman of the Carnegie Moscow Center said that Putin holds a unique position in Russian society as the only figure capable of settling disputes among the various factions and so-called "clans" that control Russia's government and major industries.

Mainly, she said, that's because he and his allies have "radically emasculated" the institutions — the courts, parliament, media — that perform this task in Western-style democracies.

That has left Putin with powers rivaling those of a czar.

"He's almighty," she said.

As a result, Putin's scheduled departure from office would create a power vacuum that is viewed with deep foreboding among Russia's political and economic leaders.

Thanks to the Kremlin's control of the media, there are no independent political figures with the stature or the means to mount a credible campaign for the presidency.

Instead, Putin has groomed various potential successors in recent years. Two of them — first deputy prime ministers Sergei Ivanov and Dmitry Medvedev — emerged as leading presidential candidates.

For months, both received prominent, extensive coverage on nightly television newscasts. But after Putin appointed the relatively obscure Viktor Zubkov as prime minister in September, both Ivanov and Medvedev were relegated to relatively brief segments late in the broadcasts.

The conflict between Putin's desire to create a precedent in Russia for the legal handover of power and his apparent conviction that he is the only figure capable of guaranteeing stability has led to months of political confusion and melodrama.

But the question of succession may be approaching a resolution, analysts here say.

Putin has hinted he might become prime minister, or run for president again after leaving office next spring. He has said that a big victory for United Russia, as expected, will give him the "moral authority" to hold the parliament and government accountable for continuing to pursue his policies.

Supporters in and out of the Kremlin meanwhile have talked about making him a "national leader" — though they have not said what formal title he might hold.

Some believe that Putin may still reconsider his decision not to run again.

"Increasingly there is a sense that Putin needs to stay on, among the elites and I think Putin himself," said Lipman.

Although the Kremlin and its allies appear to have stage-managed much of the recent clamor for Putin to stay in power, there is genuine grass-roots support for such a move.

He has quelled a separatist and Islamic rebellion in Chechnya; wrested control of Russia from a small band of billionaires, called oligarchs; and presided over Russia's economic resurrection following its near collapse in the 1990s.

Government salaries and pensions are generally paid on time, unlike a decade ago. Corruption, though worse than ever according to watchdog organizations, receives far less media coverage than it did under the late President Boris Yeltsin.

Critics say Russia would have developed faster economically and politically under more democratic leadership. They warn that the concentration of power in the Kremlin will in the long run weaken the state, by blinding it to social unrest.

Putin has also resurrected many symbols of the Soviet era, from the national anthem to the army's Red Star. He has also revived, to a limited extent, the Soviets' habit of competition and confrontation with the West.

So far, though, he has not launched the kind of massive military buildup needed to make Russia, once again, a major geopolitical power.

## **#16**

### **Jewish Activism At Its Best**

#### **Editorial**

**New York Jewish Week, November 30, 2007**

Next Thursday will mark the 20th anniversary of the highlight of American Jewish activism, the massive rally in Washington, D.C. on behalf of Soviet Jewry. Looking back, there is a wistful quality to the event because the unity of cause reflected that day has not been equaled since by our community.

An estimated 250,000 people gathered on the Washington Mall on Dec. 6, 1987, a bitter cold Sunday afternoon, on the eve of a White House meeting between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. American Jews came to plead for the freedom of their brothers and sisters in the USSR to emigrate.

It was the largest Jewish demonstration ever held in the U.S., and as American Jewish Committee executive director David

Harris, who served as national coordinator for the rally, reflects in an Opinion column (see page 23), “it was a moment in Jewish history” because it showed “what American Jews can achieve when we choose to act in unison.”

Historians say that Reagan used the rally to pressure Gorbachev; the fact is that soon after the Washington summit, the Kremlin gates opened wide and hundreds of thousands of Jews and their families left for the West, primarily Israel and the U.S.

In truth, the Soviet Jewry movement had its share of in-fighting and turf battles among American Jewish groups and between them and the government of Israel, which wanted the new immigrants to make aliyah rather than settle in the West.

And it was the persistent efforts of Natan Sharansky, recently released after almost a decade as a prisoner of conscience in Russian jails, that won the day. It was he who pushed for a massive rally in Washington over the reservations of Jewish leaders who worried about a small turnout in the dead of winter.

The '87 rally was a turning point in Jewish activism, a flexing of muscles that proved to the world — and to ourselves — that we had the potential to harness our efforts and further our cause.

The problem has been that over the last two decades we have had not the kind of common cause that the Soviet Jewry movement represented. Israel, which once served as the unifier in our community, is now a source of some of our biggest rifts – between those who push for compromise and concessions and those who urge holding firm, all in the name of peace.

The divisions prompted by the Annapolis meeting this week underscore those ongoing tensions.

“We Are One” was an effective slogan for fund-raising, but it has never characterized our community, nor should it. We pride ourselves on our diversity, part of the spirit of democracy.

If the Mideast negotiations that began this week progress, they surely will test our red-line positions about borders, the right of return and Jerusalem. In the meantime, we can take pride in our community’s efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry over a 25-year period that culminated in the Washington rally 20 years ago. And we can look to that event as a model of communal action — if and when we have the will and consensus to emulate it.

## **#17**

### **A Moment That Made Jewish History**

**By David Harris**

**New York Jewish Week, November 30, 2007**

For months in 1987, there had been reports that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev would make his first visit to Washington to meet with President Ronald Reagan. How would the Jewish community respond?

At the time, Soviet Jewish emigration was only about 800 per month, one-fifth of the peak reached in 1979. And while some prominent Prisoners of Zion and refuseniks had recently been released, many more continued to languish behind the Iron Curtain. Soviet Jewry activists wanted to take advantage of a Gorbachev trip to publicize the plight of their brethren trapped in the USSR.

But the activists were cognizant of the fact that, unlike New York, Washington historically had not produced large-scale Jewish rallies. The record of 13,000 was set when Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev traveled to the nation’s capital in 1973.

That's why there was considerable discussion about organizing a "leadership assembly" of a mere several hundred Jews from across the country that would be deemed to represent millions of American Jews. That seemed a safer bet than planning a major demonstration.

No way, said Natan Sharansky, who had been released the previous year from the Gulag. Instead, he insisted that American Jewry set a goal of 250,000 participants at a mass public event in Washington. His view prevailed.

Yet no date had been set for the Gorbachev visit. Would there be sufficient time between the announcement of a date and the Soviet leader's arrival to have a shot at turning Sharansky's lofty goal into reality?

As it turned out, there were 37 days to do so. The rally was set for Sunday, Dec. 6, on the eve of Gorbachev's arrival. The Jewish community went all out. Institutional differences were set aside in a spirit of common purpose. There was a growing sense that Dec. 6 would enter the Jewish history books, and the Washington Mall would be the place to be.

The media took notice, which helped greatly. But there was one constant question: How many people are expected? The truth was we didn't know. All that could confidently be said was that this would be the largest Jewish rally in Washington's history. Fortunately, the normally inquisitive press didn't ask about the previous record, or they might not have been so impressed with our prediction.

The day arrived. It was cold and crisp, but thankfully, no sign of snow. By early morning, groups began arriving at the Ellipse, just behind the White House. A dream was starting to become a reality. The first arrivals had traveled by bus all night, or even longer, from the Northeast, the South, the Midwest and Canada. If they were tired from their long journeys, it didn't show. With their signs, slogans and songs, they created an uplifting mood.

Throughout the morning, the numbers kept growing. Some participants flew in from Europe, Israel and Latin America. Many non-Jews, particularly noticeable in the crowd by their signs, were also there.

It came time to march east toward the demonstration site in front of the Capitol, with top politicians and religious figures, former Prisoners of Zion, refuseniks, and Jewish community leaders up front. And then came the rally itself, with its long list of distinguished speakers, including Vice President George H.W. Bush, senators and congressmen, governors, mayors, Catholic and Protestant clergy, the singing group Peter, Paul and Mary, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, Natan Sharansky, Israeli Ambassador Moshe Arad and others.

I will never forget standing on the stage and looking out at the crowd, which extended almost as far as the eye could see. What a moving sight. People had responded to the call and come. In doing so, they sent a powerful message to Jews in the Soviet Union: You are not alone. You are not forgotten. Together, we will succeed.

More than 250,000 people from all walks of life gathered on that chilly day in Washington, joined by a spectrum of top national leaders, to stand as one. This was the largest Jewish rally in American history. And the effort surely helped. Shortly afterward, the gates of the USSR opened and the Jews flooded out.

In "The Reagan Presidency: An Oral History of the Era" by Gerald S. Strober and Deborah Hart Strober, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Richard Schifter is quoted as saying:

"What the American Jewish community did was to put the Soviet Jewry issue on the U.S. government's human rights agenda. And the U.S. government, in turn, put it on the Soviet agenda. The rally in Washington took place on a Sunday. The following Tuesday, Gorbachev met with Reagan, and the person who was the note taker at the meeting told me that Reagan started out by saying to Gorbachev, 'You know, there was this rally on the Mall the other day.' And Gorbachev said, 'Yes, I heard about it. Why don't you go on and talk about arms control?' And for five minutes, Reagan kept on talking about the rally and the

importance of Jewish emigration to the United States, when Gorbachev wanted to talk about something else.”

Dec. 6, 1987, was a moment in Jewish history. Actually, it was a moment that made Jewish history. And it should serve as a model for what American Jews can achieve when we choose to act in unison.

*David A. Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, served as the national coordinator for the Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jewry Rally in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 6, 1987.*

## **#18**

### **Putin Suspends Conventional Arms Treaty**

**By Jim Heintz**

**Associated Press, November 30, 2007**

MOSCOW - President Vladimir Putin on Friday signed a law suspending Russia's participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, the Kremlin announced.

The move, although expected, was bemoaned by the United States.

The suspension takes effect Dec. 12. Under the moratorium, Russia will halt inspections and verifications of its military sites by NATO countries and will no longer be obligated to limit the number of conventional weapons deployed west of the Urals.

The 1990 arms control treaty set limits on the deployment of heavy conventional weapons by NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, to ease tensions along the border between the old Eastern bloc and Western Europe. The treaty was revised in 1999 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Russia ratified the updated treaty in 2004, but the United States and other NATO members have refused to follow suit, saying Moscow first must fulfill obligations to withdraw forces from Georgia and from Moldova's separatist region of Trans-Dniester.

Both houses of parliament passed the law on the moratorium at Putin's initiative.

Putin called for Russia's temporary withdrawal from the treaty amid mounting anger in the Kremlin over U.S. plans to build a missile defense system in eastern Europe.

The suspension also reflects Russia's growing military confidence, as it uses soaring budget revenues to rebuild the armed forces and restore Russia as a world military power.

Under the CFE, "we cannot move an extra tank in our territory," said Sergei Mironov, speaker of the upper house of parliament, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency. "In this sense, we've ceased to be masters in our own territory."

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that "even after Dec. 12 we will continue the work and seek agreements that would help attain a balance," the Interfax news agency reported.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said Washington was disappointed that Putin signed the law.

"This is a mistake. It is Russia unilaterally walking out of one of the most important arms control regimes of the last 20 years," Burns said at an international security conference in Madrid.

Russia announced two weeks ago that it had pulled out the last of its troops based in Georgia. However, questions remain about Russian troops in the separatist Georgian region of Abkhazia.

*Associated Press Writer Ciaran Giles in Madrid contributed to this report.*

**#19**

### **Putin's phoney election**

**The Economist, November 30, 2007**

MOSCOW AND TVER - "MARIA", a teacher in Tver, near Moscow, felt ashamed when she told her 15-year-old pupils to join a rally in support of President Vladimir Putin before this weekend's parliamentary election. The order came from the local administration, staffed by members of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party. "I would not have lost my life or even my job if I had not followed the order. But I felt I could not refuse it, perhaps because I am not a free person. Ten years ago I would have told you my real name," she sighs. Her pupils were given Russian flags to wave, but the sound system was so bad they could not hear the speeches. It was not until later that they learnt from television that they had joined in an "outburst of patriotic feeling".

Tver was chosen because it is the land of Mr Putin's forebears, but similar "voluntary" demonstrations have been staged all over Russia. A local theatre in Tver hosted a council of pro-Putin groups. Anyone who is for Mr Putin is for United Russia, they decreed. Or, to put it the other way round, anyone who is against United Russia is against Mr Putin. When the president decided to head United Russia's party list, its poll rating jumped from 50% to 63%.

Yet Mr Putin is not even a member of United Russia. The party is no more than a vehicle. If the advertising banners hung across streets in every Russian town are a guide, most of the country will vote for their president on December 2nd, even though he is not up for election. Indeed, the exercise is not really an election at all. It is not about political competition and does not have fair rules. It is about confirming that power in Russia lies with Mr Putin, who has presided over an oil-driven bonanza for his country.

Only candidates approved by the Kremlin are allowed to take part. Besides United Russia, which could secure 70% of the vote, these include the toothless Communist Party (which may get 12%) and the Liberal Democratic Party, a clownish far-right party set up in the late 1980s with the help of the KGB. (Its party list includes Andrei Lugovoi, the ex-KGB officer accused of poisoning his former colleague, Alexander Litvinenko, in London last year.)

The results were fixed months ago, when the Kremlin changed the rules. To keep the opposition out of parliament, the Kremlin raised the threshold for seats to 7%, and banned small parties from forming coalitions to meet this requirement. The minimum turnout rule was abolished, as was the option to vote against all candidates. Regional parties and single-mandate seats that let in independent deputies were scrapped. Opposition leaders have been harassed or arrested and their financing blocked. Television has given blanket coverage to United Russia and dished dirt on all opposition. This propaganda has been so effective that, despite United Russia's refusal to participate in TV debates, 8% of viewers believe they have seen it win them. The opposition Union of Right Forces (SPS) has not been allowed to air an advertisement warning the country against a return to the Soviet past.

Why have a people used to Soviet elections, when they had only one candidate, found the Kremlin's machinations so palatable? One reason is that Russian economic growth, sparked by the privatisations of the 1990s and kept going by the oil-price boom, has brought rising living standards and a new sense of stability. This, as well as his control of television, has made Mr Putin genuinely popular. Even the teacher from Tver says her life has improved.

The sense of stability is based largely on hopes that the crises of the 1990s will not return. Opinion polls suggest that half the people do not expect anything from this election; most believe that elections serve only those in power. Most voters say the results will be rigged anyway. Only 5% of Russians are ready to protest. "Nothing depends on us," says one woman. Yet she will vote for Mr Putin-who else? Even those who once backed the SPS will stay at home: what is the point if they are bound to lose? Worse, some 35%

of Russians prefer the Soviet political system. Two-thirds of Russians consider the concentration of power in Mr Putin's hands to be a good thing. Most would like him to stay for a third term. The strength of the Kremlin lies in the lack of any resistance to it, says Lev Gudkov, head of the Levada Centre, an independent pollster. Indeed, the only danger for the Kremlin is the possibility of an embarrassingly low voter turnout.

To guard against that, Mr Putin recently gave a rousing speech at a stadium in Moscow, broadcast on every television channel. Standing on a neon-lit catwalk in a black turtle-neck jumper, surrounded by thousands of flag-waving Putin youths, the president said Russia was in danger from ill-wishing foreigners and thieving liberals. "Those who oppose us need a weak, sick state, a disorientated, divided society, so that behind its back they can get up to their dirty deeds and profit at your and my expense," he said. "Unfortunately there are jackals inside the country who sponge off foreign embassies."

The message is clear. Russia's enemies are the liberals who in the 1990s squandered its wealth, cut defence spending and led people into poverty. They are now the candidates and sponsors of the opposition. The security services and police took Mr Putin's words as an instruction. When the opposition gathered in Moscow and St Petersburg as part of the Other Russia movement, which has not been allowed to register for this election, many people, including journalists, were beaten up and arrested. These scenes, broadcast around the world, were not shown on Russian television. Russians did not hear opposition speeches; they were not told that candidates had been unlawfully detained by the police; nor that Garry Kasparov, leader of Other Russia, was forbidden to meet his lawyer and jailed on bogus charges.

Equally, Russian television has largely ignored angry anti-government demonstrations in Ingushetia, a republic next to Chechnya where a six-year-old boy was killed recently in a skirmish between Russian commandos and local militants. Three journalists and a human-rights campaigner who came to cover the protest were abducted from their hotel and beaten up. What viewers have seen instead were pictures of fountains in Chechnya and of polite policemen in Moscow helping old ladies and children.

The paradox is that the Kremlin would surely have won even had this weekend's election been free and fair. Its heavy-handed tactics betray the nervousness linked to the transition of power in any authoritarian system. A power struggle is clearly taking place within the Kremlin, as shown by the arrests of senior officials in different camps. Mr Putin needs to retain power after his second term expires next March, but at the same time to preserve legitimacy. It is not an easy task.

This is why the parliamentary election has been turned into a ceremony of approval for him. A score of 70-75% of the vote, on a turnout of 60%, as planned by the Kremlin, would strengthen his claims to continue to lead the country. If Mr Putin cannot stay as president because the constitution bars him from a third consecutive term, he should take power with him wherever he goes. Dmitry Peskov, his spokesman, is adamant: Mr Putin will not be president after next March. But his every word will still be awaited, his every written statement demanded by newspapers. A servile president handpicked by Mr Putin and elected with a majority of, say, 51% will be unable to compete with Mr Putin's "legitimacy", says Mr Peskov.

Some Kremlin insiders think Mr Putin could make himself head of the powerful Security Council, whose functions may then be pumped up. Others suggest he could become prime minister, with extra powers, before returning to the Kremlin to replace the president, who could conveniently fall ill. The only problem of Mr Putin's system is that stepping aside even for a short time could be lethal for him and his cronies. And that is why Russia, despite the predictability of this election, feels like a country heading towards crisis.

**#20**

**Kasparov Warns of 'Chaos' in Russia  
By Clifford J. Levy and Michael Schwartz  
New York Times, November 30, 2007**

MOSCOW — Released from jail after serving a five-day sentence for leading an opposition march, Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion, warned today that Russia was heading toward chaos under President Vladimir V. Putin.

Mr. Kasparov said his coalition, Other Russia, would continue its protests against the Kremlin in order to spotlight what he described as a government that has grown increasingly repressive.

“We’ve entered a very dangerous period because we don’t know where this is going to stop,” he said at an impromptu news conference outside his home in Moscow shortly after being freed. The failure of the government to abide by its own laws and Constitution, he said, “could result in a catastrophe for the whole country.”

Mr. Kasparov was arrested last Saturday when he and other members of his coalition tried to deliver a letter to federal election officials contending that the parliamentary election this Sunday is biased toward Mr. Putin’s party, United Russia.

Mr. Kasparov said he had not been treated badly behind bars, but complained that he had been denied access to a lawyer and that a court would not hear evidence in his defense.

President Bush and other Western leaders had expressed alarm about Mr. Kasparov’s arrest, but the Kremlin dismissed their concerns, saying that Mr. Kasparov had violated the law by holding an unauthorized march and thus had faced appropriate punishment.

Mr. Kasparov’s release came as Mr. Putin made a direct, televised appeal to the nation to support United Russia, which is expected to win an overwhelming victory on Sunday. The president has used the government’s full authority to assist the party and hobble the opposition, and his speech was widely covered by the national television networks, which are under the Kremlin’s control.

“Please, do not think that everything is predetermined and the pace of development we have attained, the direction of our movement toward success will be maintained automatically by itself,” Mr. Putin said. “This is a dangerous illusion.”

Mr. Putin once again raised the specter of the difficult years after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, saying that the opposition would return the country to a time of “humiliation, dependency and disintegration.”

Meanwhile, in a Moscow court today, another adversary of Mr. Putin, the Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky, was convicted in absentia of embezzling millions of dollars from the national airline, Aeroflot.

Mr. Berezovsky, a onetime Putin ally who is now one of his most vocal critics, received a sentence of six years in prison. He lives in Britain, and did not contest the charges, saying that they were trumped up by the Kremlin. British authorities would not extradite him.