



**WASHINGTON, D.C. January 18, 2008**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

In Brief: Dr. Martin Luther King and Soviet Jewry; Armenian Presidential Election

Dear Friends:

As part of the ongoing celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet Jewry movement and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1987 March on Washington, NCSJ will be highlighting throughout the year the work of individuals and organizations that made a difference in the freedom of Soviet Jews.

This Monday, the nation will observe the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King was a prominent supporter and spokesman on behalf of Soviet Jewry. As early as October 1963, Dr. King said, "I cannot stand idly by...and not be concerned about what happens to my brothers and sisters who happen to be Jews in Soviet Russia."

In this week's update there are two pieces about Dr. King's involvement, including a 1965 letter to the editor of the *New York Times* and an excerpt from his 1966 speech before the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry, NCSJ's predecessor.

In the *New York Times* letter, he writes "I am profoundly shocked by the treatment of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union. I would like strongly to endorse the moral protest and appeal of conscience to the Soviet Union...In the name of humanity; I urge that the Soviet Government end all discriminatory measures against its Jewish community. I will not remain silent in the face of injustice."

Speaking before the American Conference a year later, he stated, "While Jews in Russia may not be physically murdered, as they were in Nazi Germany, they are facing everyday a kind of spiritual and cultural genocide. The absence of opportunity to associate as Jews in the enjoyment of Jewish culture and religious experience becomes a severe limitation upon the individual." Dr. King intimately understood the isolation and discrimination Jews were suffering at the hands of the Soviet government, and more importantly, lent his credibility and voice to our movement.

It was just reported today that U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation William Joseph Burns will return to Washington to replace R. Nicholas Burns as Undersecretary of State. NCSJ will miss Amb. Burns in Moscow, but looks forward to working with him in his new capacity at the State Department.

Armenia elects a new president in February. The current Prime Minister Serge Sarkisian and former President Levon Ter-Petrosian are the two main candidates. We have included a brief report on the Armenian election, and will share more information with you as the election gets closer.

Also this week, we have included extra stories about the Caucasus and Central Asia. We hope it will provide insight on the many challenges confronting the United States in this part of the world.

As always, we are interested in your feedback. If there are issues and/or concerns that you would like addressed, please contact us at [ncsj@ncsj.org](mailto:ncsj@ncsj.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark B. Levin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" being the most prominent.

Mark B. Levin  
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. January 18, 2008

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**#1**

**Dr. King Joins the Protest**

**By Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

**New York Times: Letter to the Editor, January 16, 1965**

I am profoundly shocked by the treatment of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union. I would like strongly to endorse the moral protest and appeal of conscience to the Soviet Union published as an advertisement in The Times Jan. 14.

I should like to add my voice to the list of distinguished Americans of all faiths who have called the injustices perpetrated against the Jewish community in the Soviet Union to the attention of the world.

The struggle of the Negro people for freedom is inextricably interwoven with the universal struggle of all peoples to be free from discrimination and oppression. The Jewish people must be given their full rights as Soviet citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. itself.

The anti-Jewish tone of the economic trials must cease. The free functioning of synagogues should be permitted. There should be no interference with the performance of sacred rites. The religious and cultural freedom of this old Jewish community should be re-established.

In the name of humanity, I urge that the Soviet Government end all the discriminatory measures against its Jewish community. I will not remain silent in the face of injustice.

## **#2**

### **From Dr. King's 1966 Address to the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry:**

"While Jews in Russia may not be physically murdered, as they were in Nazi Germany, they are facing everyday a kind of spiritual and cultural genocide. The absence of opportunity to associate as Jews in the enjoyment of Jewish culture and religious experience becomes a severe limitation upon the individual. These deprivations are a part of a person's emotional and intellectual life. They determine whether he is fulfilled as a human being. Blacks as well understand and sympathize with this problem. When you are written out of history, as a people, when you are given no choice but to accept the majority culture, you are denied an aspect of your own identity. Ultimately you suffer a corrosion of your self-understanding and your self-respect."

## **#3**

### **Ambassador to Moscow Up for State Post**

**By Mathew Lee**

**Associated Press, January 18, 2008**

President Bush will nominate the U.S. ambassador to Russia, William Burns, for the State Department's third-highest job with plans to put him in charge of the administration's efforts to contain Iran, senior U.S. officials told The Associated Press.

He would replace Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, who on Friday announced his resignation effective at the end of March. The two Burnses are not related.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the nomination announcement, expected later Friday from the White House, had not been made.

Before moving to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in 2005, William Burns was the top U.S. diplomat for the Middle East.

If confirmed by the Senate, he will inherit most of his predecessor's duties, notably the ongoing U.S. diplomatic push to impose new U.N. sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, the officials said.

Those attempts have stalled in the face of Russian and Chinese resistance in the U.N. Security Council and following a recent U.S. intelligence report that concluded Tehran had stopped its nuclear weapons program in late 2003 and has not resumed it. Iran says it never had a weapons program. Nonetheless, the Bush administration has vowed to continue to ramp up pressure on Iran to meet international demands to halt uranium enrichment and reprocessing that could make the material needed to construct nuclear weapons.

Nicholas Burns has been a key player in negotiations over a third U.N. sanctions resolution on Iran, speaking almost daily with his counterparts from the four other permanent Security Council members — Britain, China, France, Russia — as well as Germany.

He plans to accompany Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to a meeting of foreign ministers from those nations next week in Berlin in a bid to push forward with the resolution.

At a ceremony to announce his retirement after a 26-year career in the foreign service, Rice paid tribute to a man she called a friend she has known for 18 years.

"He has been the consummate diplomat serving on behalf of the United States in some of our most difficult circumstances, working on some of most difficult issues," Rice said of Nicholas Burns.

Aside from Iran, those issues have included negotiating a controversial civilian nuclear deal with India and dealing with the complicated portfolio of the Balkans, particularly the issue of the Serbian entity of Kosovo, which intends to soon declare independence in a move forcefully opposed by Serbia and its ally Russia.

Rice said that, after leaving, Burns had agreed to continue "to work on the India file, particularly because we would like to push the U.S. civil nuclear agreement to conclusion."

William Burns, a former assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs and former ambassador to Jordan, joined the foreign service in 1982 and has worked in senior policy planning posts at the State Department as well as at the National Security Council. He took over the Russia portfolio at the NSC during the waning years of the Cold War, during the administration of the first President Bush.

Nicholas Burns, 51, had previously served as the U.S. ambassador to NATO and to Greece as well as State Department spokesman. He will be taking a job in the private sector, officials said, discounting long-standing speculation that Burns might have aspirations for elected office in his home state of Massachusetts.

In his farewell address, Burns said he was leaving because it's "time for me to meet my obligations to my wife and three daughters, and it's time to pursue other ventures outside the government."

#### **#4**

#### **Armenian Presidential Elections**

**By Ben Sack**

**National Conference on Soviet Jewry, January 17, 2008**

On February 19, 2008, Armenia will go to the polls to vote in their presidential elections. This will bring an end to President Robert Kocharian's two five year terms.

The two front runners to replace Kocharian are the current Prime Minister Serge Sarkisian and past President Levon Ter-Petrosian. Sarkisian is from the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), and has been Kocharian's long time chief lieutenant. Ter-Petrosian was the first president of the newly independent Armenia from 1990 to 1998 when he resigned from office following public demonstrations against his policies on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Sarkisian is seen as the establishment candidate; representing the party currently in power. Ter-Petrosian is viewed by many Armenians as the one political leader who could unite the smaller opposition parties to mount a formidable race against the HHK. Ter-Petrosian has been having meetings with several major figures from other opposition parties leading up to the election. Recently he has met with Raffi Hovannisian, his former foreign minister and now head of the Heritage Party, which stirred even more talk of a unified opposition.

With reference to the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, Sarkisian has taken a tougher stance than his opponent Ter-Petrosian. In 1988, the ethnically Armenian dominated territory, which lies within Azerbaijan borders, voted by referendum to cede from Azerbaijan and join Armenia. This led to a battle that ended in 1994 with

an internationally negotiated cease fire. Tensions are still high between the two countries as to who should maintain control of the land.

Sarkisian has stated that he will uphold with the current Armenian policy which completely rules out returning the disputed territory to Azerbaijani control.

Armenia's post communist history has been marked with struggle. Its past presidential and parliamentary elections have received less than stellar grades by international election observers. The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) said that the last presidential election in 2003 was "marred by serious irregularities in a large number of polling stations," in a process that, "fell short of international standards for democratic elections."

In conversations with the Armenian Jewish community, there is strong Jewish support for Sarkisian, but, the community has no major issues with either candidate.

We will keep you informed of any new developments related to this issue. For more information on Armenia's presidential elections and the rest of the former Soviet Union, please visit our website [www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org).

## #5

### **Changing Times: Mark Levin's Quarter Century Journey**

#### **Mosaic: The Magazine of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, January 16, 2008**

"It's not often that you can say you've been a part of something that really helped to change a significant part of the world, let alone help our own people in the state of Israel at the same time," says a proud, yet humble Mark Levin, executive director of the National Council of Soviet Jewry (NCSJ). He's referring to the late 80s and early 90s when hundreds of thousands of Jews were finally able to leave the Soviet Union. Working for NCSJ for over 25 years, Mark has seen some of the best and worst of times for Jews in Russia, the Ukraine, and the Baltic states. And though many organizations helped lobby for change at the time, and still continue to do so, without NCSJ's savvy political advocacy talents, it's doubtful how far-reaching the change would have been. Created in 1971, NCSJ, a beneficiary of the Federation, is often referred to as "the voice" of American Jewry on issues confronting the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Says Mark, "NCSJ is an irreplaceable asset for the community because we're the conduit between all the governments of the region and the U.S. government. Because we have support from over 300 Federations and close to 50 national agencies like AIPAC and the ADL, we are broadly based."

Ed Robin, chairman of NCSJ and founding chair of the Federation's Israel & Overseas Committee, remembers the late 80s and early 90s, too. At that time, Ed was instrumental in raising resettlement funds for Soviet Jews and bringing over 250,000 people from across the country to the Mall in Washington, D.C. to welcome Mikhail Gorbachev to America. "I think it's fair to say that apart from the establishment of the state of Israel, the freeing of the Jews of the Soviet Union is the greatest Jewish accomplishment of the twentieth century," says Ed. "NCSJ was on the fulcrum of that moment."

For an idea of just how different the geography and composition of the Jewish world was before and after Gorbachev, consider these numbers: In 1984, fewer than 900 Jews were permitted to leave the USSR. A mere five years later, with Gorbachev in power, nearly 19,000 made it either to the U.S. or Israel. By 1991, more than 145,000 were on their way to Israel alone. As Mark says, this change, which helped transform the Jewish State, was "nothing short of miraculous." But he's also aware that one should never rest on one's laurels. Even though the situation for the Jews in that region of the world has improved, Mark and his team continue to work hard for the survival of the Jewish people. "One of our challenges today is to build on our successes and ensure that they're long-term. After all, we're dealing with the third largest population in the world when you combine the 15 countries we represent."

One of the biggest problems facing the region today is, sadly, one of the Jewish people's oldest problems: anti-Semitism. In the Ukraine, for example, one of the country's largest private universities, MAUP, is publishing anti-Semitic literature and issuing statements supporting the destruction of the State of Israel.

Additionally, this past January, MAUP president Georgy Schokin published a piece in one of the schools newspapers blaming Ukraine's problems on the Chabad Lubavitch movement. Synagogues and Holocaust memorials are being vandalized, and Jews are often the targets of violent attacks. In the town of Dnepropetrovsk, for example, four yeshiva students were attacked by 30 skinheads. Though the students survived, these kinds of incidents are occurring more and more frequently throughout the Ukraine, and in Russia, as well.

Mark says, "Yes, the governments of these countries are speaking out, but we need to get them to take additional steps to make systemic changes that will have a generational change. I go back to 1985, when less than 1,000 people got out of Russia. Everyone threw up their hands and said, 'What can we do?' Well, changes did take place, and we were part of that change. Today, we can help these countries make fundamental changes."

So what kind of changes are Mark and NCSJ working toward? "Better laws that deal with hate crimes," he says. "Better law enforcement, better use of mass media and greater infiltration of the educational system in teaching concepts like pluralism and tolerance."

His last point is especially important, considering the rise of neo-Nazis and skinheads in different sectors of Russian society. For a country that suffered as much as it did at the hands of Hitler, this phenomenon is of special concern because the government isn't doing enough to discourage the activity. Mark explains that in April, the neo-Nazis were allowed to march in the middle of Moscow to celebrate Hitler's birthday. Despite that under Russian law, both public incitement of ethnic hatred and the use of Nazi symbols are illegal, there were no arrests. "What kind of message does that send to the Jews of Russia?" Mark asks.

NCSJ has been working through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which has held a series of meetings and conferences on anti-Semitism that all the countries of Europe, the U.S., and Canada have attended. And while Russia and the Ukraine have also attended such conferences, clearly more needs to be done. Mark also says more needs to be done to help stem the transfer of technology from Russia to Iran, another issue NCSJ is working on.

But the good news is that in most parts of the FSU, Jews are now able to live their lives peacefully, thanks in no small part to the work of NCSJ. For Mark, it's been a very exciting quarter-century. "To see the countries we work with now developing diplomatic relations with Israel when so many others are hostile is very rewarding," he says.

Commenting on Mark's long, industrious career at the head of NCSJ, Ed Robin says, "Mark is diligent, committed, personable and never fails to get the job done. That's why he's really the Jewish address, and in some cases the U.S. address, for the ministries of these countries. It's apparent when you travel with him, when you see the relationships he has with officials overseas. We're very fortunate to have him."

Clearly, so are millions of Jews living in the FSU.

For the print version, please use this link:

<http://www.ncsj.org/AuxPages/010108Mosaic-Levin.pdf>

**#6**

**Helen Teplitskaia: Business and Politics in Russia beyond the Headlines  
Summary By Ben Sack, NCSJ  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, January 14, 2008**

The main thrust of the lecture was on the overall increase in Russia's economic and political standing in the region, and the world. Polling from credible sources shows that Putin is well liked by Russians, and economic indicators show that Russian power is on the rise.

- Levada Center Polling shows that Putin has an 87% approval rating
- Russia's GDP growth in 2006: 6.7% | in 2007: 7.6%

- Foreign Direct Investment in 2006: 2.7% | in 2007: 3.3%
- Gold and Currency Reserves in 2006: 301.7 billion | in 2007: 466.2 billion
- Trade with the EU totaled in 2003: 85 billion Euros | in 2006: 209 billion Euros (Russia's largest trade partner)

These facts allude to a larger theme of expanded Russian influence. Russia no longer exerts itself in the world merely through weapons and arms dealings, but through energy and economics.

- Russia has embedded itself in the Eurasian Economies predominately in several fields:
  - o Hydrocarbons, Power-grids, transportation, gas and oil pipelines, etc.
  - o In particular, Russia has new agreements with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for the pumping of gas
  - o Another key development is the creation of the Union State of Russia and Belarus
    - Instrumental in providing gas to Europe

In terms of Russia's relations with the west, it has gone through lengths to assert itself internationally.

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was created to make a forum in which Asia could create stronger bonds
  - o Russia and China are the two major members, but Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are all members as well
- The appointment of Rogozin to NATO is also an assertion of Russian international policy
  - o Rogozin falls in line with Putin across the board on foreign policy
  - o Namely, he will resist Kosovo independence, as it would be a dangerous precedent for Russia to deal with

The effects of all of this can be seen already as Russia is more frequently looked to for help in influencing world affairs (Korea, Iran, Sudan, etc.) Russia's key goals for the next several years and beyond are:

- Curb inflation
- Increase their energy influence in the world
- Achieve real tax reform
- Ascension in WTO
- Develop its high tech sector
- Increase its intellectual and innovative competitiveness

With all of this in mind, the suggestion to the United States would be to allow Russia to graduate from Jackson-Vanik in order to enable US business to openly deal with Russia. If this does not happen, Russia, with its emerging economic clout will do more business and trade with Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and the United States will be left behind. The US should seize this opportunity to create stronger strategic bonds with Russia as we have done with China despite China's track record with democracy and human rights.

## **#7**

### **Georgian Presidential Elections: Results and Implications**

**Summary by David Shulman, NCSJ**

**Hudson Institute, January 16, 2008**

#### Panel

Zeyno Baran, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute (moderator)

Charles Fairbanks, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ, retired), International Republican Institute Board of Directors

Vasil Sikharulidze, Ambassador of Georgia to the United States

Kenneth Wollack, President, National Democratic Institute

In November 2007, after massive public protests against his presidency, Georgian leader Mikhail Saakashvili announced an early presidential election for on January 5, 2008. Saakashvili was reelected outright with around 53 percent of the vote, preventing a second, run-off election. While many in the

opposition claimed the elections were manipulated, the international community (except for Russia) declared that the elections “complied with basic international standards” and were “the most competitive in Georgia’s history.”

Opposition protests continue. Meanwhile, Saakashvili—whose inauguration will take place January 20—has stated that he intends to reach out to the opposition and build a national consensus in order to tackle the myriad challenges that plague the country.

Ms. Baran posed several broad questions: was the vote legitimate? What is the nature of the opposition? And what is the election’s significance in U.S.-Georgia relations?

Congressman Kolbe headed the IRI’s election observation mission to Georgia, from January 4-6. Echoing other election observers, he listed the Saakashvili camp’s advantages: incumbency, better finances, a short campaign season, and a disorganized opposition. But these advantages were not unfairly exploited, he said. The IRI team visited 120 polling places in eight provinces and Kolbe called the election “professional,” fair, open and transparent.

Mr. Wollack also upheld the election’s legitimacy. While Saakashvili abused some public resources, he said, opposition access to media became more balanced in the campaign’s later days, and isolated reports of corruption and intimidation favoring Saakashvili were quickly acted upon by his ruling party. The election, while flawed, he said, was legitimate and not fraudulent, and steps are already being taken to correct some flaws.

Mr. Fairbanks called the election’s legitimacy into serious question, and said Georgia’s democracy and Western leanings were in doubt. Outside the capital, he said, there was no opposition TV for most of the campaign. He was highly suspicious of voting trends outside of Tbilisi that strongly favored Saakashvili.

Amb. Sikharulidze called the elections unequivocally legitimate and noted the economic challenges Georgia faces. He also mentioned that the election included two plebiscites, in which voters overwhelmingly favored NATO integration and April parliamentary elections.

## **#8**

### **Almost Two-Thirds of Russians Believe Democracy is the Best Political System**

**By Jonas Bernstein**

**Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 16, 2008**

A poll take by the Russian affiliate of a leading international polling organization has found that Russians believe in democracy but are less certain that it exists at home. The poll, taken by Romir, the Gallup International Association’s exclusive representative in Russia, was conducted June 15-21 as part of Gallup International’s annual Voice of the People Survey, for which more than 60,000 people in 57 countries were surveyed.

According to Gazeta.ru, 64% of the Russians polled by Romir answered in the affirmative when asked if democracy is the best political system. Among respondents aged 30 or younger, 71% answered this question affirmatively, while only 50% of those older than 65 answered in the affirmative. In addition, those with higher incomes tended to be more sympathetic toward democracy. Gazeta.ru quoted Romir consultant Igor Berezin as saying the age-determined differences were not surprising, given that the older respondents grew up under “different political conditions” – meaning under the Soviet system – and that they associate democracy with the 1990s (when economic dislocation and chaos hit older Russian particularly hard). The results of the polling in Russia were similar to those found in Central and Eastern Europe, where 68% of those polled said democracy is the best political system. Worldwide, 79% of those polled said democracy is the best political system (85% in North America, 84% in Western Europe, 84% in Africa, 80% in Latin America, and 78% in the Asia-Pacific region).

Russians, however, are much less happy about democracy à la Russe: Only 57% of those polled by Romir said they were satisfied with democracy in Russia. That result was similar to those in the other countries of the former Soviet Union, where 56% of the respondents said they were satisfied with democracy in their countries. Worldwide, 69% of those polled said they were happy with democracy in their countries. In addition, 80% of the Russians polled by Romir said they doubted that Russia is governed by the will of its people – compared with 70% of the respondents in the other former Soviet republics and 63% worldwide. What is more, only 26% of the respondents in the Romir poll said they thought elections in Russia are free and fair. In the other countries of the former Soviet Union, 31% of those polled by Gallup International said they thought elections in their countries are free and fair, while worldwide 47% said they thought election in their countries are free and fair.

Commenting on the results of the Romir poll, Dmitry Badovsky, director of the Institute of Social Systems, told Gazeta.ru: "In Russia there is not a political culture that idealizes democracy as in the West. And, what is more, far from everything is all right with democratic development here. Many respondents, in pointing to democracy as the best form of government, have in mind not Russian democracy specifically, but democracy in general" (Gazeta.ru, January 14).

A poll conducted by the independent Levada Center last December found that 67% of Russians believe that Russia should develop along the path of democracy, but 47% believe Russia needs a special kind of democracy that corresponds to its national traditions and specific character. According to the Levada Center, 22% of the respondents said democracy in Russia should develop along the lines of democracy in Europe and the United States, 17% of those polled said they were against Russia having a democratic form of government (actually, 10% said "democracy" in Russia should be as it was under the Soviet Union while 7% said Russia should not have a democracy at all), and another 17% said they found it difficult to say whether or not Russia should have a democracy (Gazeta.ru, December 18, 2007).

Meanwhile, in its latest Freedom in the World report, Freedom House cites Russia's parliamentary elections last December as one of several reminders that freedom is under threat in a number of countries (the group also cited the Georgian government's imposition of a state of emergency and crackdown on opposition demonstrators, Benazir Bhutto's assassination and an increase in terrorism by Islamic extremists in Pakistan and the post-election violence in Kenya that has killed hundreds). According to the Associated Press, the Freedom House report states that the State Duma elections that took place in Russia last December 2 were carried out under patently unfair conditions, with political parties and candidates who challenged President Vladimir Putin sidelined and the news media, largely controlled by the state and Putin's supporters, giving overwhelming coverage to Putin and his allies (Associated Press, January 15).

**#9**

## **NO RIGHT TO PROTECTION**

**By Ruslan Gorevoi**

**Versia, January, 2008**

Once sponsors of the Russian human rights community, Western donor organizations rapidly lose interest in Russia. Figures are quite telling: European and American funds transacted nearly \$80 million to Russian organizations within the framework of all sorts of democracy-promotion programs in 2006. In 2007, sum total amounted to only about \$20 million, and even this money went to prominent organizations like the Moscow Helsinki Group and Memorial only.

Does it mean that the Russian human rights movement is heading for a crisis?

Exodus of activists is what awaits the human rights community in Russia in the near future. At least, that's what it itself expects. "Absence of funding will first and foremost hurt human rights structures in the regions," Lyudmila Alekseyeva of the Moscow Helsinki Group said. "People there have been working for a pittance, on pure enthusiasm. They'll probably leave now in order to survive. That's quite understandable."

"Financial prosperity of activists of human rights organizations is a tall tale," Yuri Schmidt, human rights activist and lawyer from St. Petersburg, confirmed. "It is the selfless who have been working so far, but even they will probably go now."

They are already going, and en masse. Almost 100 autonomous human rights organizations - partners of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Memorial, Journalist Union, and so on - closed down in late 2007. Seeing political stability in Russia, the West lost interest. Funding ebbed.

All in all, human rights organizations the world over, including Russia's, tend to demonstrate their independence. (We accept nothing from the government and brook no control therefore.) "On the other hand, finances are willingly accepted from the funds set up, say, by the US Department of State," Sergei Markov, political scientist and Duma deputy, said. "Strange, isn't it? Something ambivalent, because our own government does not pay and therefore does not control human rights organizations but a foreign government... Nobody gave it a thought in the 1990s, even though the first "spy scandals" involving the Russian human rights community, its foreign sponsors, and Russian state secrets occurred in Boris Yeltsin's days."

There are lots of human rights and so called non-governmental organizations in the United States. Some of them are sponsored by wealthy altruists, others (they are known as GONGO or government-oriented non-governmental organizations) by the state budget - paradoxical as it undoubtedly is. Not a single organization in the United States, however, is financed by the funds set up by governments of foreign states. In Russia, it has been the other way round.

It will be strange for a foreign power, sponsor of non-governmental organizations on the territory of another sovereign state, not to expect to benefit from its benevolence. "It is therefore logical and understandable that when the approximate sum the West intended to spend on promotion of democracy in Russia became known a year or so ago, everybody knew that the human rights community was paid to get into politics," Markov said.

And that was what happened. Lev Ponomarev, leader of the Movement For Human Rights who had promoted the necessity to keep a safe distance from politics only recently (at the All-Russian Democratic Conference, that is), became directly involved in politics. In fact, Ponomarev is chums with politicians like Mikhail Kasianov and Garry Kasparov these days. Young Yabloko leader Ilya Yashin seems nothing extraordinary in it. As far as he is concerned, human rights activists do what they think they should be doing.

On the other hand, not all prominent human rights activists turned political. A whole number of organizations (like the Journalist Union, Glasnost Protection Foundation, Consumers' Rights Promotion Society, Memorial) keep their distance from political struggle.

In any case, the parliamentary campaign is over. Since the West is not half as benevolent as it likes to pretend it is, it cut down funding of the Russian human rights community regardless of the forthcoming presidential campaign.

In the meantime, human rights organizations do serve as a buffer between society and the powers-that-be - promoting interests of the former and defending it from the latter.

The part they are playing in some Russian regions cannot be overestimated. Consider Ingushetia, a republic suffering from utter chaos and lawlessness, a republic where people end up missing again and again. It is human rights organizations that the population relies on. It is human rights organizations that search for the missing people there, often at the risk to their activists' very lives. The Russian authorities are unlikely to want to finance them. No wonder, since the official statistical data have little in common with the actual state of affairs reported by the human rights community.

## **#10**

### **Kiev Says It's Ready for NATO**

**Reuters, January 17, 2008**

Ukraine said it was ready to take the next step toward NATO membership, the president's office said Wednesday, after more than a year of stalled relations.

President Viktor Yushchenko has made joining NATO a long-term priority, but relations with the alliance cooled after Moscow-backed Viktor Yanukovych became prime minister in 2006 and said the country opposed entry.

Current Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who replaced Yanukovych late last year, joined the president and parliament Speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk in writing a letter to NATO asking it to accept Ukraine into the Membership Action Plan, a step toward accession. The letter was published by the president's office.

"It is the president's opinion that we have entered a moment of truth in our relations with NATO," top presidential foreign policy aide Oleksander Chaly told journalists Wednesday. "We clearly declare ... that we are ready to fulfill all the obligations that the country accepts to join the action plan."

Ukraine hopes to receive an answer from NATO at a summit in Bucharest in April, the letter said.

NATO was set up early in the Cold War to counter the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact, and many people in former Soviet states are suspicious of the alliance.

Ukrainians are split. In the west of the country, those who despised Moscow's control during the Soviet era embraced the idea of NATO, while millions of Russian speakers living in the east and south share Moscow's distrust.

The letter acknowledges the divide, saying extra cash had been allocated this year for an information campaign. Visiting U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, a senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also urged a public debate on NATO entry.

During a political crisis in 2006 that resulted in Yanukovych forming his government, the president and prime minister agreed that NATO membership must be put to a referendum. Tymoshenko, who was present during the crisis talks and has long been noncommittal about NATO, never signed the agreement.

## **#11**

### **Russia says an independent Kosovo can never join U.N.**

**By Louis Charbonneau**

**Reuters, January 17, 2008**

Russia on Wednesday backed its ally Serbia, saying Kosovo will never become a member of the United Nations or other international organizations if the breakaway province unilaterally declares independence.

The two million Albanians in the Serbian province are expected to declare independence sometime after Serbia's presidential elections later this month.

Serbian President Boris Tadic said in a speech to the U.N. Security Council that his country would never recognize a sovereign Kosovo, a view the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, made clear Moscow shared.

"They (Kosovo) would not become members of the United Nations, they would not become members of international political institutions ... if they go down the road of unilateral declarations," Churkin told reporters.

As a permanent veto-wielding member of the 15-nation Security Council, which would have to approve Kosovo's U.N. membership, Moscow would have the power to block any request from Pristina to join the United Nations.

But Churkin would not directly say whether Russia was prepared to block Kosovo's U.N. membership.

Both Churkin and Tadic urged the Security Council to continue working to find a solution to the Kosovo problem that is acceptable to both Belgrade and Pristina. But diplomats say the time for such talks is over.

U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad told reporters the Security Council was blocked and no longer had any role to play on the issue of Kosovo's future status.

Churkin disagreed. "The matter is firmly locked in the Security Council," he said.

Western diplomats say Russia has prevented the council from passing a resolution that would open the door to independence for Kosovo. But Churkin made clear that Moscow did not feel responsible for the impasse and hoped the council would discuss his idea of a "roadmap" that could resolve the Kosovo issue.

#### 'TWO INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES'

The United States and the vast majority of the 27-nation European Union would recognize Kosovo immediately after it announces it has become a sovereign state, Western diplomats say.

"Serbia will never recognize Kosovo's independence and will preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty by all democratic means, legal arguments and diplomacy," Tadic told the council, adding "Serbia will not resort to violence and war."

Khalilzad welcomed Tadic's assurances and urged Belgrade not to use economic weapons like restricting the region's access to water or electricity.

Kosovo's newly elected prime minister, ethnic Albanian former guerrilla Hashim Thaci, also addressed the council. Afterward he said Pristina would not wait much longer to declare independence. "I am sure that the decision will be taken very soon," he said.

Thaci shook hands with Tadic in the council chamber. A reporter asked him to describe the moment.

"We shook hands as the leaders of two independent countries," Thaci said.

As the role of the United Nations in Kosovo shrinks, the EU plans take over U.N. police and justice functions, with NATO troops continuing to maintain order in an independent Kosovo.

Joachim Ruecker, the chief U.N. administrator in Kosovo, indicated the province could stand on its own.

"Kosovo's institutions are now ready for the next step," he said. "If all sides have good will, I think we can achieve this."

#### #12

#### **Voices from Afar: Cold War II?**

**By Andreas Umland**

[www.nationalinterest.org](http://www.nationalinterest.org), January 16, 2008

Is a new cold war on the horizon? More than fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the idea that we have to worry about Russia again seems outdated, ridiculous and hysterical. Yet, the chatter in the news

media and in Washington policy circles is eerily similar to what we might have heard in 1985: What of the various clans vying for power in Moscow? What is Putin up to? Is Medvedev a reformer or opportunist?

Looking at Russia's internal machinations isn't the same as peering into a crystal ball, but it can provide insight into whether a new Iron Curtain is falling over Moscow. Contrary to popular belief, the current Russian Federation for all its resemblances with the Soviet Union is not totalitarian. Whereas elections in Russia are neither free nor anything close to fair, the voting itself happens, in most regions, in a relatively orderly fashion. Although Russia's mass media is under the open or hidden control of the Kremlin, manifest censorship is rare, and pundits are free to formulate competing visions of Russia's future in public. While civic and political groups are closely watched by the government, they can develop relatively uninhibited as long as they pose no threat to the current regime. High energy prices give Putin and his entourage considerable autonomy, but do not eliminate constraints on the Kremlin: The regime's stability is a reflection of its popularity. Russia's current state is a hybrid neither fully authoritarian nor meaningfully democratic; actively manipulating, but also ultimately dependent on, public opinion.

But what is more disturbing is that the modicum of free expression tolerated by the regime betrays a flourishing radicalism among the Russian population. And after years of incessant anti-Western propaganda, Russia's establishment has also largely adopted a paranoid worldview. Moscow's mainstream TV and radio stations, major newspapers and political spokesmen have been spreading the idea that most of Russia's problems come from abroad. You hear it on popular talk shows, at political congresses, or during scholarly conferences: They usually blame it on the United States, IMF or NATO, claiming they are, at least indirectly, responsible for this or that problem of Russia economic mishaps, loss of international influence, cultural degradation, social issues the list goes on. In one way or another, the amerikantsy and their "agents of influence" in Moscow are to blame for the breakup of the Soviet Union and all the economic struggles that came after. The dismemberment of Yugoslavia, the Orange Revolution in Kiev, Russia's estrangement from Georgia, its humiliation by Estonia who other than Brussels and Washington could be responsible for this?

Until recently, such conspiracy theorizing merely raised eyebrows or even provided a chuckle in the West. All this changed in 2007: Putin's anti-American speech at a Munich security conference in February began a series of similar public accusations by the Russian president throughout the year. According to Putin, Russia's (and the whole non-Western world's) major contemporary challenge is to limit the various machinations of the neo-imperialist United States. In Moscow's brave new world, the American-led West is trying to undermine the independence, sovereignty and distinctiveness of non-Western civilizations, not the least of which is Russia. So-called non-governmental organizations and democratic movements are little more than "fifth columns" in this process, fronts for pushing the national interest of the only remaining superpower. Whether or to what degree the Kremlin itself believes this story is, eventually, inconsequential - these accusations have become commonplace in Russian public life. They are reproduced on a daily basis in the media, taught in schools and colleges, and elaborated on in academic research; they have found their way into the post-Soviet Russian national identity. Each year, newspapers, publishing houses and think tanks produce more bizarre attacks on the United States and the West that increasingly resemble Soviet propaganda, though they are more sophisticated.

Right now it is unclear how this trend could be reversed or even stopped. The fear is that anti-Western sentiment in Russia may spiral out of the Kremlin's control. A number of ideologues from the lunatic fringe are already part of Russia's political establishment. Take Alexander Dugin, a political commentator little known in the West but prominent in Russian public and intellectual life. A rabid anti-American, Dugin openly praised the Third Reich, the SS and fascism in general in the 1990s. Nevertheless, his "International Eurasian Movement" has today among its official members Russia's minister of culture (Alexander Sokolov), Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council (the upper house of the Russian parliament) Alexander Torshin and presidential advisor Aslambek Aslakhonov. As recently as 2006, Dugin singled out for praise the ideas of Gregor and Otto Strasser two Germans who helped Hitler build the Nazi party in the 1920s. Yet in spite of such statements Dugin has become a well-respected participant on primetime political talk shows; some of his numerous tomes are used as textbooks in Russian schools and universities.

Now Putin's turn to conspiracy-theorizing has given Dugin and others of his ilk a powerful push: Their ideas have been confirmed by Russia's most popular man and entered the cultural mainstream. The president has publicly condemned U.S. foreign policy, compared Russia's liberals to jackals skulking around foreign embassies and warned the West "to keep its nose out" of Russia's internal affairs. This is pretty much what Moscow's post-Soviet "ultras" have been saying since the early 1990s. If the popularization of Moscow radicals' Manichean views continues in Russian society unabated, sooner or later we will find ourselves in another cold war.

### **#13**

#### **Freedom Is Downgraded From 'Bad'**

**By Alexander Osipovich**

**Moscow Times, January 17, 2008**

The level of freedom in Russia went "from bad to worse" in 2007, a U.S. democracy watchdog said in a report released Wednesday.

Russians enjoy the same level of freedom as citizens of Angola, Egypt and Tajikistan, according to the latest annual report card from Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization based in New York and Washington.

Freedom House evaluates countries on the political rights and civil liberties enjoyed by their citizens, dividing them into the categories of Free, Partly Free and Not Free.

Although Russia has been deemed Not Free for several years now, it suffered a further setback in 2007, largely because of abuses during the State Duma election campaign, the report says.

Those abuses included overwhelmingly pro-Kremlin coverage in the national media, the intimidation of opposition candidates and a prohibitively high threshold for small parties to enter the Duma, said Christopher Walker, director of studies at Freedom House.

"One can't ignore the almost blanket inability of alternative voices to find their way into the news media," Walker said by telephone from Washington. "If they do, it's often in a jaundiced fashion, with them being portrayed negatively."

A woman who answered the phone at the Kremlin press service said nobody was available to comment Wednesday.

But Sergei Markov, a Duma deputy from the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, called Freedom House a "Russophobic" organization.

"You can listen to everything they say, except when it comes to Russia," said Markov, a Kremlin-linked political analyst who was elected to the Duma last month. "There are many Russophobes there."

In recent years, Moscow has repeatedly lashed out at Western NGOs like Freedom House, calling them biased and accusing them of serving U.S. interests.

Walker stressed that Freedom House made its evaluations based on objective criteria explained on the organization's web site, and he denied that it had a pro-U.S. agenda.

"If you look closely at the 193 countries that we evaluate, you'll find that we criticize what are often considered strategic allies of the United States," he said.

One such country that is criticized in the new report is Russia's neighbor Georgia, which has been led by a pro-Western president, Mikheil Saakashvili, since 2003.

In November, Saakashvili ordered a violent crackdown on opposition protesters and shut down the country's leading independent television channel. After an international outcry, he called for an early presidential election, which he won earlier this month amid accusations of vote rigging.

Freedom House described the November developments as a "substantial reversal" for Georgia's democratization efforts.

The organization also criticized last month's parliamentary election in Kyrgyzstan, which ended with a near sweep by the ruling coalition. Declines in freedom were also noted in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

The Freedom House report listed Russia as one of several "energy-rich dictatorships," including Iran and Venezuela, which use their oil wealth to negative effect on smaller neighbors.

It described the former Soviet Union as one region that suffered serious reversals in 2007, along with South Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

## **#14**

### **Ukraine Clears Final Hurdle to WTO The Moscow Times, January 18, 2008**

The European Union said Thursday that it had cleared the final hurdles in talks about Ukraine's accession to the World Trade Organization after Kiev agreed to a deal on the duties it applies to exports.

Ukraine is the biggest country besides Russia and Iran outside the 151-member WTO, which oversees global trade.

At a meeting in London late Wednesday, EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson and Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Hryhoriy Nemyrya "sealed the final terms of the agreement" clearing the way for Ukraine's entry into the WTO, Mandelson said in a statement.

The EU was the last trade partner to have reservations about Ukraine's WTO membership.

"Today's agreement clears the way for Ukraine fully to join the world trading system," Mandelson said. "This is the first step toward greater Ukrainian integration with the global and the European economy."

He said the EU would soon begin negotiations for "a comprehensive free trade agreement with Ukraine."

Chile's WTO ambassador, Mario Matus, who chairs the working party on Ukraine's accession, said earlier this month that he hoped to have a meeting of WTO members in the second half of January to finalize the accession package, provided the export duty issue was resolved.

The way would then be clear for the next WTO general council on Feb. 5 and 6 to vote on Ukraine's accession request.

WTO membership will provide new export opportunities for Ukraine's industry, still saddled with Soviet-era plants, and its farmers, who cultivate some of the most fertile land in Europe.

Membership would not only allow Ukraine, which borders new EU members Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, to share the benefits of the multilateral trading system but would also give it significant leverage over Russia.

Once Ukraine has joined the WTO it will be able to set conditions for Russia's own accession as the WTO operates by consensus of all its members. Georgia, which has a series of political and economic disputes with Moscow, is using its membership to hold up Russia's accession.

Ukraine had completed negotiations with the WTO as a group, but WTO accession rules required it to reach a bilateral agreement with any member that sought it, from which all other members benefit.

Differences with the EU about export duties were the last remaining hurdle, with Brussels seeking a guarantee from Ukraine to reduce them, not just a declaration of intent.

The EU was particularly concerned about export duties on nonferrous metals, which Brussels argued constituted an effective subsidy for domestic metallurgy plants.

The EU also wanted guarantees that Ukraine would not circumvent the restrictions on export duties by introducing measures with the equivalent effect, such as taxes or license fees.

The EU has said Ukraine's WTO membership will allow for the negotiation of a free trade agreement with the bloc.

"The success of these negotiations is an important step toward forming an expanded free trade zone with the EU in the future," Nemyrya said at a Cabinet meeting in Kiev on Thursday, Interfax reported.

WTO membership takes effect only when it has been ratified by the acceding country, which has six months from approval to do so.

## **#15**

### **Israeli Minister Gets Little Support**

**By Nikolaus von Twickel**

**The Moscow Times, January 18, 2008**

Livni had earlier asked the government to increase pressure on the leadership in Iran to curtail its nuclear ambitions, complaining that the present course might be actually helping Iran along its current path.

"Now that Russia has started delivering nuclear fuel to Bushehr, [Iran's] uranium enrichment may serve military goals," Livni told a conference at Moscow's Diplomatic Academy before her meeting with Lavrov.

Russia last month delivered the first shipment of nuclear fuel to Iran's first nuclear power plant, in Bushehr, a step that both Moscow and Washington said should convince Tehran to stop its own uranium enrichment program.

Russia is building the facility, but it has delayed the completion of the plant, saying Iran has been slow to make payments. Iranian officials have denied payment delays and accused Moscow of kowtowing to the West.

On Thursday, Lavrov went only as far as to say that it was paramount to support United Nations inspections in Iran.

"Everything must be done to extend rather than narrow the International Atomic Energy Agency's abilities to continue its work," he said, Interfax reported.

Livni warned that Teheran represented a major threat.

"Iran is a dangerous combination of an almost insane ideology, of nuclear weapons development and of their proliferation among other countries," she said.

Israel says Iran could have a nuclear bomb by 2010 and that violent statements by its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, demonstrate that this would threaten its existence.

Russia, by contrast, denies that there is any military element in the Iranian program and has opposed U.S. calls for tough sanctions against Teheran. Without mentioning Israel or the United States, Lavrov repeated past warnings against unilateral action.

"It is necessary to mount collective efforts, abstain from unilateral steps and focus on Iran's fulfillment of the demands formulated by the International Atomic Energy Agency and supported by the UN Security Council," he said, adding that Moscow would insist on a political settlement as the only reasonable alternative.

Leaving political differences aside, both countries announced a breakthrough on the issue of travel for their citizens. Lavrov said negotiations on a visa-free regime had been completed and needed only to be accepted formally by both governments, Interfax reported.

"The abolition of visas will double or even triple the number of Russian tourists in Israel to over 250,000 per year," Federation Council member and ex-president of the Russian Jewish Congress Vladimir Slutsker said, Interfax reported.

## **#16**

### **Kazakhstan's President Calls Foreign Missionaries a Threat Reuters Brief, January 18, 2008**

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev criticized foreign missionaries on Thursday as a threat to national stability and urged lawmakers to curb their activities.

The mainly Muslim country has positioned itself as an area of stability in the potentially volatile Central Asian region. But some rights groups have criticized its treatment of small groups such as Hare Krishna.

Speaking at a congress of the Nur-Otan party, which holds all seats in the lower house of the parliament, Nazarbayev said foreign missionaries posed a threat to secularity.

"We are a secular state where religion is separated from the state, but this does not mean Kazakhstan should become a dumping ground for all kinds of religious movements," he said the veteran leader, without naming any groups.

"There are tens of thousands of missionary organizations working in Kazakhstan today. We don't know what their aims are. ... We cannot leave it like that and let them do something that our country does not need," he said.

Nazarbayev often singles out ethnic and religious accord as one of his main achievements in the country, which has a large Orthodox Christian community.

But Western human rights groups say religious intolerance toward smaller groups is on the rise.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe criticized Kazakhstan last year for destroying houses belonging to followers of Hare Krishna, who practice yoga and vegetarianism in a village near Almaty.

## **#17**

### **Rabbi Calls for Ukrainian Hate Probe JTA Brief, January 18, 2008**

Ukraine's chief rabbi called for an investigation into anti-Semitic provocation by an unknown group.

In late December, a group calling itself the "Orthodox public organization of Odessa" used some Russian Orthodox churches in Odessa to distribute anti-Semitic pamphlets calling for pogroms and the murder of Jews.

Rabbi Azriel Chaikin, one of Ukraine's chief rabbis, called on Ukraine's government and Secret Service to investigate the case and rebuff such provocations, which he said "have anti-Semitic as well as anti-Ukrainian character" and "are equally offensive for every man."

"To repulse provokers is a task of every citizen of Ukraine but first of all of every representative of Ukrainian authority," an open letter read. "Every incident, every attempt to incite interfaith and interethnic discord, should be investigated with all due care."

## **#18**

### **Distributor of anti-Semitic screeds sentenced JTA Brief, January 18, 2008**

A man who distributed anti-Semitic leaflets in Kiev was sentenced to four years in prison.

Vasiliy Ostrinsky, 43, was convicted on two charges. The Kiev district court dropped a charge of inciting interethnic hatred and deferred the sentence for two years, the Ukrainian daily newspaper Segodnya/Today reported Thursday.

Jewish leaders in Ukraine were disappointed that Ostrinsky was not prosecuted under the Ukrainian Criminal Code for the incitement of ethnic or racial strife.

"The Jewish community was hoping that the case would be a lesson demonstrating that the court system is really ready to fight against anti-Semitism," Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman, one of Ukraine's chief rabbis, told JTA.

Ostrinsky, who is unemployed and from the Odessa region, was acting alone on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Monarchic Party when he distributed thousands of leaflets titled "Jewish Fascism," "Zionism Against Mankind" and "Warning to America" near the Kiev central railway and underground stations, according to the Ukrainian Secret Service.

## **#19**

### **Ukrainian lawmaker demands apology JTA Brief, January 18, 2008**

A Ukrainian Jewish lawmaker demanded an apology from a regional official over a seemingly anti-Semitic remark.

Member of Parliament Aleksandr Feldman, the president of the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine and chairman of the Kharkov Regional Jewish Community, told JTA he was incensed over Vasily Salygin's New Year's remark made at the Kharkov City Council session hall on Dec. 30.

Salygin, a head of the Kharkov Regional Council and leader of the Region's Party regional organization, said he hoped "never to hear the sound of the greeting 'Shalom!' at the council session hall in the following year."

Feldman told JTA he intends to bring an action against Salygin and expressed alarm that no Ukrainian politicians or public figures did not condemn the remark.

"I'm profoundly indignant over the incident, as it is not the first manifestation of xenophobia and anti-Semitism from Kharkov officials," he said. "Ukraine is still too far from the civilized Europe."

The Kharkov city newspaper Sobytia/Events wrote that "in every civilized country such statements are interpreted as a manifestation of anti-Semitism."

## **#20**

### **Number of Russian asylum seekers abroad on the rise - rights activist Interfax Russia Brief, January 15, 2008**

Human rights activists note a surge in (the number of) Russian nationals' applications to Western countries asking them for a (political) asylum.

"We can see a new wave of applications of (Russian nationals) to Western countries asking them for a (political) asylum," head of the civil assistance committee under the Russian president, Svetlana Gannushkina, said at a news conference on Tuesday (15 January).

According to Gannushkina, over the last three months a total of 1,200 Russian nationals went through the waiting area at Paris airports in France and asked for a political asylum in that country. "In December, 600 people from Chechnya asked for a political asylum," Gannushkina said.

"People buy transit airline tickets via Paris and ask for a political asylum there without going to the countries they were bound for as per their tickets, mainly Morocco," she said.

Gannushkina also showed a document which, according to her, is an order of the French Interior Ministry which says that Chechens should not be extradited from that country.

## **#21**

### **Russia Will Review Relations with Ukraine After It Joins NATO Interfax AVN Brief, January 15, 2008**

Russia will review its relations with Ukraine following its possible entry to NATO, Russia's Ambassador to Kyiv Viktor Chernomyrdin said.

"It is Ukraine's domestic affair what it wants to join, who it wants to be friends with, and who it wants to love. NATO and the EU is our choice. Let it be, enter, if you think that this is needed. We just explain that if you enter NATO, we will have to review our relations. Ukraine is our largest neighbor and we have too close ties with it, in particular as to 'sensitive' technologies and political affairs, to take it membership in NATO that simple," Chernomyrdin said in an interview with the Ukraina journal, the press service of the Russian embassy in Ukraine said.

Chernomyrdin thinks that Ukraine should clearly define reasons for its possible integration in the alliance.

"NATO is a military bloc. I can hear one speaking in Ukraine that "NATO is a club." An interesting club With nuclear arms. The Warsaw Pact, which evolved as an opposition to NATO, thus, was not a club. And why has NATO become a political club? One says today that NATO protects its member states from military threats by deploying military bases on their territories. Then a question arises: whether one attacks Ukraine?" the ambassador said.

Chernomyrdin said that Russia does not want to revise relations with Ukraine. "That is we explain our position and possible consequences for Ukraine at all levels. However, we do not say: do not enter. This is your choice," the diplomat said.

## **#22**

## **Bush Calls Saakashvili the Victor Reuters Brief, January 16, 2008**

U.S. President George W. Bush has congratulated Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili for winning a presidential election that the opposition has said was rigged.

Saakashvili, a U.S. ally, won the Jan. 5 election with more than half of the vote, according to official figures. Bush called Saakashvili on Monday while taking off from Dubai for Riyadh as he toured the Middle East, U.S. National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley said.

"The president, just as we took off, called President-elect Saakashvili of Georgia, congratulated him on his electoral victory," Hadley told reporters on the Air Force One presidential jet.

"Saakashvili was appreciative of the president's call. He indicated that he had reached out to the opposition and was going to try and build a consensus during his -- what will be, obviously, his last term as president," Hadley said.

When asked whether Bush raised any concerns about the way election was run and whether there was any question about how democratic it was, Hadley said: "The president didn't."

"There have been a number of groups that have opined on that subject, and it's pretty clear that he won more than 50 percent, and therefore, avoided a second round," he said. "What he heard, what I think was very encouraging, was Saakashvili's indication that he was going to reach out to the opposition and try and build a national consensus going forward in his rule."

### **#23**

## **Russian tourist numbers to Israel could treble if visas scrapped RIA Novosti Brief, January 18, 2008**

The number of Russians visiting Israel could double or even treble if a visa-free system is introduced between the countries, a former head of the Russian Jewish Congress said on Thursday.

"The number of Russian visitors to Israel could exceed 250,000 people annually in the next three years," said Vladimir Slutsker, a member of the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia's parliament.

Russia and Israel announced late last year that a feasibility study for a project to cancel visas had been concluded, and the two countries launched domestic procedures for drafting a corresponding agreement.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, currently on an official visit to Moscow, told a meeting with Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov earlier on Thursday that coordination of the agreement was currently being concluded.

Slutsker said that of more than 2 million tourists who visited Israel in 2007, half a million were U.S. nationals followed by 250,000 French visitors. Russian tourists held third place with more than 100,000 people.

He said visa-free travel between the two countries would be both economically useful and historically natural. He said immigrants from Russia and other former Soviet republics accounted for over 1 million of Israel's 7 million citizens. Visits to friends and relatives would probably rise dramatically if visas were lifted, he said.

### **#24**

## **Saakashvili Wants To Leave Good Relations with Russia Behind His Second Term In Office Interfax Russia Brief, January 13, 2008**

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who officially won the recent Georgian snap presidential elections, is certain that a civil war is not a threat to Georgia.

"Georgia is a country of paradoxes. People can quarrel with each other and call each other whatever names in the morning and drink together't the same table in the evening. I have witnessed this many times. I can assure you that our people are wise enough to prevent any escalation," Saakashvili said in an interview with the Vesti Nedeli TV program on Sunday.

The Georgian president also noted that Georgia is interested in friendly relations with Russia.

"To speak about what I would like to leave to the next generations of Georgian politicians and even my children behind my second presidential term, and one can be elected president only twice, this is smooth close and friendly relations with everyone, primarily Russia," Saakashvili said.

"I speak about this explicitly and honestly. I think that we lost many opportunities in the past four years," the president said.

"There are no issues as regards geopolitics that we would not be able to solve in the spirit of cooperation, even given the fact that we will be approaching and getting more close to NATO and other partners in the West and the East. Our policy will be multifaceted," Saakashvili said.

## **#25**

### **Police investigating appearance of anti-Semitic leaflets in Odessa Interfax Russia Brief, January 15, 2008**

A criminal case related to the distribution of anti-Semitic tracts has been opened in Odessa.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said it will investigate the case, together with the prosecutor's office.

The head of the press service of the SBU's Odessa branch Vladimir Romanenko declined to comment on the situation before the conclusion of the investigation.

Chairman of the Odessa diocese of religious education, catechism and missionary work Oleg Mokryak said that the leaflets amounted to eight pages of printed material qualifying any relations with Jews as sinful and listing numerous proverbs and sayings smearing Jews. The leaflets bear the signature of the Orthodox community of Odessa.

Mokryak said that the Orthodox Church condemns and considers the anti-Semitic activity launched by the so called Orthodox community of Odessa in the closing days of 2007 and early in 2008 as unacceptable.

The organizers of the action are seeking to induce open actions from some Odessa residents against Jews, Chief Rabbi of Odessa and southern Ukraine Avraam Volf said. "The authors of these leaflets and those who are behind them are bloodthirsty. They do not want to go on fishing in murky waters any more, they want to fish in rivers streaming with blood," he said.

## **#26**

### **Azerbaijan's Security is Significant for Azerbaijan: US Senator Trend News Agency: Brief, January 14, 2008**

The influential US Senator, Republican Richard Lugar, said in Baku on 14 January that Azerbaijan's security is significant for the USA.

"Azerbaijan is a very important country for us, where notable changes are taking place," he told a press-conference in Baku.

He said that the USA also co-operates with the neighbors of Azerbaijan who already are in possession of defense and with the countries that already have the elements of weapons of mass destruction. "The US special services will do its best in order to ensure the security of the region," he said. According to Lugar, the USA is interested in co-operating with Azerbaijan with regards to the security and intends for this to continue.

**#27**

**Lenin Monument as Last Soviet Symbol Removed From Tajik Capital  
Itar-Tass Brief, January 11, 2008**

The last Soviet era symbol in Tajikistan -- the Lenin monument in the Tajik capital's central park -- has been removed from its place. The Dushanbe mayor's office has decided to hand it over to the republic's Art Fund that will decide the further fate of the bronze sculpture of the Soviet state's founder, the Dushanbe administration head's press secretary Shavkat Saidov told Itar-Tass on Friday, adding that after the reconstruction of the capital's park, a monument to Persian-Tajik poet Abu-Abdullo Rudaki would be erected there.

Tajik communists earlier asked to hand over the Lenin monument to the republic's Communist Party to place it near the entrance of the party's central committee.

Communists and many ordinary people in the country associate the name of Lenin with the Tajik state revival and many social achievements, a party representative noted, expressing the hope that the Tajik president would give a positive answer to their request.

**#28**

**Georgians Celebrate and Protest at a Rally  
By Misha Dzhindzhikhashvili  
The Associated Press, January 16, 2008**

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated on Tuesday in Georgia's capital, pressing for a presidential runoff but celebrating an agreement giving government opponents more control over the main state-funded television station.

Protesters streamed to the small square outside the headquarters of Georgian Public Television for the rally, many wearing white bandannas, a symbol of the opposition, around their necks. The crowd spilled across the street, reaching 30,000 and blocking traffic.

"We will not compromise," said Levan Gachechiladze, the candidate who came in second to incumbent Mikheil Saakashvili in the vote on Jan. 5, according to official results. "We will not take a single step back. We will not let them falsify the election."

Saakashvili's inauguration for a second term is expected early next week, but the opposition does not accept the official results. Opposition leaders reiterated calls for a runoff between Gachechiladze and Saakashvili, who they claim fell short of the 50 percent needed to win outright.

Results released by the Central Elections Commission on Sunday showed Saakashvili with more than 53 percent and Gachechiladze with more than 25 percent.

While international observers gave a mixed assessment of the vote, they said it met most of Georgia's democratic commitments.

Opposition leaders had planned to call for the ouster of the leadership of the state-funded television station, which they accuse of denying them airtime and favoring the government.

But opposition leaders and Nino Burdzhaneladze, the Saakashvili ally who is acting president pending Saakashvili's inauguration, announced an agreement to give the opposition equal representation on a supervisory board at the station.

"We have won a big victory," Gachechiladze told the crowd. "From today forward, Public Television will be in the hands of the people."

Opposition leaders stressed they would continue contesting the election results.

"We will fight for the truth," said Giorgi Khaindrava, an opposition leader who, like many others, is a former Saakashvili ally.

The demonstration lasted about an hour before leaders told the crowd to disperse. It came two days after an opposition protest drew 60,000 people to central Tbilisi to protest the election.

Saakashvili was elected with 96 percent of the vote in January 2004 after leading the peaceful Rose Revolution protests that ousted his predecessor. But his popularity has faded amid persistent poverty and accusations of authoritarianism.

He called the election Jan. 5, a year ahead of schedule, after ordering a violent crackdown on opposition protesters in November -- moves aimed to maintain his grip on power and stave off a mounting opposition challenge.

Georgia's justice minister, Eka Tkeshelashvili, on Tuesday said the election was competitive and showed that country had overcome its "post-Soviet mentality."

Tkeshelashvili, in an interview during a visit to Vienna, also said protesters contesting the official results would not be silenced.

"What is important is that results of the election, they do reflect the will of the Georgian people and have been widely recognized," she said.

Tkeshelashvili acknowledged that international election observers gave the country mixed marks but said deficiencies were largely because of a time crunch. In the 3,511 precincts, there were only two attempts at ballot stuffing, she said, adding that investigations were under way and that the cases were being "taken very seriously."

## **#29**

### **Conflict Resolution, Border Security Are Top OSCE Priorities for 2008**

**By Jean-Christophe Peuch**

**Eurasianet, January 15, 2008**

Trying to solve the protracted Soviet-era conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and the Transdniester was among Belgium's top priorities when it assumed the rotating leadership of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2006.

Despite Belgium Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht's anticipation that his chairmanship would bring "new opportunities," the year brought no substantial progress on any of the three conflicts.

Spain, which led the OSCE throughout 2007, did not make conflict resolution a top priority. Its efforts focused primarily on the fight against terrorism and environmental issues, among others. But Finland, which assumed the organization's leadership at the beginning of this year, intends to turn the spotlight back on the so-called "frozen conflicts."

Addressing the OSCE's Permanent Council in Vienna on January 10, Finnish Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva said conflict prevention and conflict management would "lie at the core of [the Finnish] chairmanship."

"I will use every opportunity to make progress on regional issues in close consultation with all parties," he told the panel.

In a program that was circulated among OSCE ambassadors, Kanerva said he would seek "to create enabling conditions for the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts" and "encourage all the parties to resume negotiations in order to find feasible political resolutions of the conflicts."

Georgia's Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili last October said Finland's firm stance against Russia when it held the rotating presidency of the European Union the previous year gave him reasons to hope that substantial progress would be made on the South Ossetian conflict in 2008.

But with presidential elections scheduled in Armenia and Azerbaijan later this year, Finland's task will certainly not be easy -- even though its diplomats are generally believed to be more familiar with the Soviet-era "frozen conflicts" than their Belgian or Spanish counterparts.

In comments made to Baku's Day.az, an electronic daily, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov on December 7 said that because of Helsinki's longtime involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks he was looking forward to the upcoming Finnish chairmanship. But he implicitly warned against setting expectations too high, saying that "elections always make the atmosphere of negotiations more sensitive."

In the years 1995-1996 Finland co-chaired the Minsk Group of nations that has been mediating in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks on behalf of the OSCE. Kanerva told the Permanent Council he had appointed Heikki Talvitie to assist and advise him during his chairmanship. Talvitie has served as Finland's Minsk Group co-chair and the EU's special representative to the South Caucasus. Another former member of Finland's Minsk Group co-chairmanship team, Ambassador Terhi Hakala, has been in charge of the OSCE Mission to Georgia since October.

Talking to reporters in Vienna last week, Talvitie said he believed there was a "momentum" in Nagorno-Karabakh and that "there might be one" in South Ossetia. However, he said Finland should be "realistic" as to what it could expect to achieve in the region.

A member of the Finnish delegation told EurasiaNet on condition of anonymity that the new chairman-in-office will concentrate his efforts on trying to improve the work of the existing negotiation mechanisms in which the OSCE is involved, in particular that of the Joint Control Commission (JCC), a quadrilateral body co-chaired by Georgian, South Ossetian, North Ossetian and Russian representatives. "We're not trying to make a big fuss about our role, but if we can help in a technical way that will mean a lot in many other ways," the Finnish diplomat said.

Negotiations between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali are stalled. Georgia accuses Russia and South Ossetia of blocking the implementation of all decisions made within the JCC framework and demands that the negotiation format be changed.

The JCC met in a plenary session only once last year. The October meeting produced no results, notably because of Tbilisi's insistence that Dmitri Sanakoyev, the head of the recently created pro-Georgian provisional administration of South Ossetia, be recognized as a fully-fledged party to the peace process.

Asked by EurasiaNet whether Finland would consider engaging with Sanakoyev, Talvitie remained non-committal. "Sanakoyev is a new element. Let's see in the future if he fits into the picture," he said.

Beyond the frozen conflicts, Kanerva said in his program that Finland's chairmanship would also encourage the OSCE to build stronger relations with its Central Asian member states with a view to helping them combat human trafficking and the smuggling of arms and drugs. With this respect, he says, the organization should put a "specific focus" on border security and management.

In his address to the Permanent Council, Finland's chief diplomat pointed out that his country already had contributed more than 500,000 euros (\$745,000) to projects aimed at enhancing the security of the Tajik-Afghan border.

One of the few achievements of the OSCE Ministerial Council that took place in Madrid in November was a consensual decision to step up the organization's engagement with partner state Afghanistan, with a special focus on securing its borders with the Central Asian countries of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Madrid decision followed the launching of an OSCE project to train Afghan anti-drug police.

Kanerva last week invited Kazakhstan and Lithuania -- which are due to take the helm of the OSCE in 2010 and 2011, respectively -- to join the organization's current troika "in developing ideas for long-term activities."

The troika is the OSCE's main political decision-making institution. It consists of the chairman-in-office, its predecessor, and its successor. Kanerva suggested that representatives of the future "quintet" meet in Finland this year "to identify possible common priorities for the purpose of better planning."

### **#30**

#### **Turkmenistan/Iran: Good Relations Take Turn for the Worse**

**By Bruce Pannier**

**RFE/RL, January 15, 2008**

#### **Back in June, they were "the best of friends."**

At least, that's how Turkmen media portrayed a Tehran meeting last year between President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov and his Iranian counterpart, Mahmud Ahmadinejad. It was an assessment in line with a tradition of friendly ties with Iran maintained by Berdimukhammedov's late predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov.

It is a tradition that, six months later, appears dead.

In recent days, long-festering strains in the Turkmen-Iranian relationship -- which involves gas, electricity, fishing rights, and water sharing, as well as sensitivities surrounding northern Iran's 3 million ethnic Turkmen -- have been made public. And as Ashgabat and Tehran haggle over gas supplies and other issues, ordinary people in Iran and Turkey are bearing the brunt of the dispute during a winter of record cold.

Iranian-Turkmen talks on the price of gas exports broke down in December. Then, as the New Year began, Ashgabat cut supplies to Iran, blaming it on maintenance work on the pipeline.

But Iranian officials have now made it clear that the issue clearly involves price. Iranian Oil and Gas Minister Gholamhossein Nozari recently said that talks on raising the price for Turkmen natural gas, from the current \$75 to \$140 per 1,000 cubic meters, would resume only when the supplies were restored. Nozari added that if deliveries did not resume, Iran could refuse to buy Turkmen gas.

The Turkmen government responded that due to Iran's failure to pay for already-delivered gas, Ashgabat lacks the funds to repair the pipeline -- and hence, to resume the flow of gas to Iran.

Iran's national gas company has denied that Iran needed to pay any arrears. And on January 15, Iranian Deputy Oil and Gas Minister Akbar Torkan said Turkmenistan was trying to "put forth new claims" and

called the decision to cut supplies in the heart of winter "immoral."

It all marks quite a departure from typical Iranian-Turkmen ties. "Iran was one of the countries with which Niyazov had a charitable relationship," Russian-based political analyst Artem Ulunyan told RFE/RL's Turkmen Service. "It's well-known to many that when there was talk [in Turkmenistan] about the [ethnic] Turkmen population in Iran, Niyazov said, 'don't even think about that, don't ask any questions that could be considered in Tehran as antagonistic,' or he personally would punish those who did."

Iran reciprocated by never speaking about the often bizarre behavior of Niyazov, whom Turkmen media gave a semi-divine status, or about Niyazov's book "Rukhnama" (Guide to the Soul) that Turkmen media and state officials spoke of as a second Koran.

### **Other Reasons Behind Gas Dispute?**

There are other recent events that make the timing of Turkmenistan's suspension of gas supplies intriguing.

On January 4, a group of Iranian Turkmen was fishing illegally in the southern Caspian Sea when Iranian patrol boats spotted them and, according to some sources, rammed the boats and shot dead one of the fisherman. That sparked protests from the ethnic-Turkmen community, some of whom attacked government buildings and torched state vehicles.

After the riots, some 300 ethnic Turkmen were arrested and some reports say many of them are still in detention for antistate activities. Such reports may or may not influence Ashgabat's relations with Iran, but neither are they likely to hurry efforts to restore gas supplies to Iran.

Other potential irritants in the Iranian-Turkmen relationship include the use of water supplies in their border areas and perceived discrimination against ethnic Turkmen, who also complain of Iranian efforts to forcibly convert them from Sunni to Shi'ite Islam.

But the gas dispute is interesting for another reason, one that will not have escaped the notice of the Iranian government.

Over the last year, a succession of high-level U.S. delegations has visited Turkmenistan. The most recent was a visit by U.S. Senator Richard Lugar (Republican, Indiana) to Ashgabat on January 11-13, which came on the heels of visit by Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Erica Barks-Ruggles in December.

Alex Vatanka, a security analyst for Jane's information group, says it is still too early to say whether the United States might be pushing Turkmenistan to take a tougher stance with Iran, Washington's longtime foe. But he said such speculation is warranted, given the geopolitics and Iran's domestic situation.

"The supply of gas from Turkmenistan at this crucial time, winter period, not showing up will make Ahmadinejad more [domestic] enemies," Vatanka says. "And in the Iranian context, I think it's important because that gas from Turkmenistan is not destined for the big cities -- Tehran and so forth -- where Ahmadinejad has almost no support base. Where Ahmadinejad has some support base is in the provinces, like those regions that have been receiving Turkmen natural gas and rely on that gas. And if those people are not getting the gas then the point is, again, they'll be angry above all at the president. So, from a U.S. point of view, this is to undermine the presidency of Ahmadinejad, and I think, timing-wise, this is strategically important because you are only two months away from the parliamentary elections in March and you have presidential elections in 2009."

Vatanka said that if Washington does have enough clout to achieve such a feat, that alone would represent a major change in Central Asian politics. "If the United States has been able to compel or impel [Turkmenistan] to do this, to cut the gas to Iran, the big message obviously there is, wow, the U.S. suddenly has found its leverage in Turkmenistan, a Central Asian state that it has traditionally not been very influential in."

## **...Or Is Dispute Part Of A Wider Struggle?**

But in a region famous for great-power tussles, the United States is hardly the only actor.

Aleksei Miller, the CEO of the Russian gas monopoly Gazprom, which buys most of Turkmenistan's gas, said in December that officials from the United States and European Union have been telling Turkmen officials that the price of Turkmen gas is too low. Miller made those remarks as Gazprom raised the price it pays for Turkmen gas from \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters to \$130 for the first half of 2008 and \$150 for the second half of the year.

Last year, the EU resurrected the idea of a trans-Caspian pipeline to bring Turkmen gas to Europe, where consumers would pay a higher price than Turkmenistan's current customers, who are essentially Russia and Iran.

But there is at least one more theory on the gas cutoffs, which have prompted Iran in turn to reduce gas exports to customers in Turkey. Professor Mehmet Seyfettin Erol of Ghazi University in Turkey speculates that Russia could be behind Ashgabat's newly assertive energy stance.

"As far as I understand, improving ties between the U.S. and Turkey concerns not only Iran but also makes Russia feel uneasy," Erol says. "Russia's refusal in the last few days to increase gas exports to Turkey -- for the first time -- also shows that Russia has some role here. In a situation like this, I think Turkey is currently facing energy pressure led by Iran and Russia. I think there is not any serious problem between Turkmenistan and Iran; the role of Russia is important. I think, and as far as I understand, there is a new game being played, and Russia is the main actor behind this game."

Meanwhile, ordinary people in northern Iran and eastern Turkey are paying the price for the gas cuts. In both areas, temperatures have dropped to record lows ranging from minus 3 to minus 27 degrees Celsius.

### **#31**

#### **Human Rights and Democracy in Belarus off to Discouraging Start in the New Year Rep. Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Congressional Record Extension of Remarks, January 15, 2008**

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida: Madam Speaker, last month, I chaired a Helsinki Commission briefing with a delegation of leading political opposition figures and democratic activists from Belarus. The briefing was entitled, "The Future Belarus: Democracy or Dictatorship" and focused on the prospects for change in a country located in the heart of Europe that has Europe's worst track record with respect to human rights and democracy. Unfortunately, developments since the delegation's visit to Washington have been deeply discouraging and do not bode well for Belarus' democratic future.

One of the young people who testified at the briefing, 19-year-old Zmitser Fedaruk, spoke eloquently of the dangers that young human rights activists face in Belarus. His words were prophetic, as a few days later, back in Belarus, he was beaten and knocked unconscious by riot policemen, then rushed by ambulance to the hospital. Just last week, the Minsk district prosecutor's office in Minsk refused to open an investigation into Zmitser's beating.

A day earlier, my friend Anatoly Lebedka, one of Belarus' staunchest defenders of democratic rights, who also testified before the Commission, was roughed up by Belarusian police as well. It was far from the first time that this leader of the democratic opposition had been beaten up or repressed by the Lukashenka regime. On January 4, the Lukashenka regime banned Anatoly from traveling abroad in what was obviously a politically-motivated decision. Today, Anatoly is in jail serving a 15-day sentence, along with several dozen other pro-democracy and small business advocates who participated in a January 10 protest against restrictions on activities of small businesses. Some of the activists—mostly young people—received injuries during their arrest. Tatyana Tsishkevch, who was severely beaten during her arrest and presented her

bloodstained jacket in court, received a 20-day sentence. Arsien Pakhomau, a freelance photo correspondent for "Nasha Niva" weekly—one of the very few remaining independent publications in Belarus—was also sentenced to 15 days' administrative arrest. On the day of the protest, a number of websites that cover social and economic affairs in Belarus, such as Charter '97 and Radio Liberty, were partially or fully blocked by the authorities.

These most recent repressive actions follow the sentencing of opposition activist Artur Finkevich to 18 months in prison; the arbitrary use of judicial power to put out of business independent newspapers such as "Novi Chas"; steps to liquidate the opposition Belarusian Communist Party; and the fining of Baptist pastor Yuri Kravchuk for unregistered religious activity. Belarus is the only country in Europe with compulsory registration before religious activity can take place.

Unfortunately, the indications in just the first few weeks of this New Year are not encouraging. Lukashenka's presidential administration has recently rejected the opposition's proposal to hold talks on the upcoming 2008 parliamentary elections, refusing an offer by the Belarusian opposition to consider joint proposals on conducting parliamentary elections in accordance with democratic standards.

Madam Speaker, as Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and as someone who has long been involved in the OSCE process to promote security, cooperation, democracy and human rights among the 56 OSCE countries, including Belarus, I am deeply disappointed in the Belarusian Government's continual flaunting of freely undertaken OSCE commitments. It is my strong hope that Mr. Lukashenka will cease the self-imposed isolation of his country—threatening, most recently, to expel U.S. Ambassador Karen Stewart—and will give serious thought to the offers of cooperation that have come from the United States and the European Union if Belarus releases political prisoners and displays respect for basic democratic norms. In the meantime, the Lukashenka regime can be assured that my colleagues and I on the Helsinki Commission are determined to stand by Anatoly Lebedka, Dzmitri Fedaruk and all those in Belarus—young and old—bravely struggling for freedom, democracy and respect for human rights.

## **#32**

### **Georgia: With New Political Landscape, Can Stability Prevail?**

**By Brian Whitmore**

**RFE/RL, January 11, 2008**

Humbled by a narrow victory in Georgia's snap elections, President Mikheil Saakashvili has admitted that he can no longer "ignore the opinions" of his opponents.

Neither, it appears, can his allies in the West.

Since sweeping to power in the wake of the 2003 Rose Revolution, Saakashvili has carefully cultivated the image of a democratic reformer who would lead Georgia out of its post-Soviet funk and into the promised land of Europe's mainstream. His U.S. education, single-minded determination to join NATO, and open defiance of Moscow led many Western policymakers to view him as a reliable ally in the volatile and strategically important South Caucasus.

But in the wake of the January 5 election -- in which Saakashvili won 52 percent of the vote, narrowly avoiding a runoff -- the emphasis has suddenly shifted from big-picture goals like trans-Atlantic integration to smaller-scale domestic issues, like poverty and infrastructure.

Moreover, the man who won 96 percent of the vote in 2004 is no longer the undisputed master of Georgia's political universe. If Saakashvili's newly conciliatory tone is any indication, the year ahead could see the country's political system become far more colorful and diverse than it was during the past four years.

Former Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar, who serves as a special economic adviser to Saakashvili, told RFE/RL's Georgian Service that better government is ahead. "The biggest problem is when the opposition

is weak," Laar says. "The government makes bad policies, it makes more mistakes. To have a strong and organized opposition is the best thing that can happen to any government. You don't need big majorities."

## Common Interest

Observers can also be hopeful that pet Saakashvili issues like Georgia's NATO bid will remain on track. Politically, membership of the Western alliance inspires far less of the internal divisiveness seen, for example, in countries like Ukraine. A plebiscite that coincided with the snap presidential election shows that more than two-thirds of the Georgian public supports membership.

But moving toward NATO and opening up the political process may not be easy tasks to conduct simultaneously. Georgia's rough geopolitical neighborhood further complicates the equation. Russia, which remains determined to block Tbilisi's NATO goals, is undoubtedly heartened by Saakashvili's electoral wing-clipping and is sure to continue fomenting conflict in the pro-Moscow separatist enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Such pressure in the past has caused Saakashvili's government to respond with a siege mentality that has ignored opposition voices and hindered the democratic process in its "with-us-or-against-us" zeal.

"You have had a government that has been unable to operate in a normal mode. And a big reason for that is the immense external pressure that they have been subjected to," says Svante Cornell, head of the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm.

"Without Western engagement in the security of the country, you are unlikely to either get security or stable democratic development," Cornell continues. "As long as the external and transnational threats are so strong, it will simply impede the democratic process. If you want a democratic Georgia, you have to invest in Georgia's security."

And therein lies the paradox. To continue moving toward the West and NATO in this new environment, Saakashvili needs to engage the opposition and be more democratic. But for Georgia's famously single-minded leader, that openness might come more easily once the security of alliance membership is in place.

## The Revolution Is Over

Georgia's presidential election came in the aftermath of a two-month-long political crisis that saw Saakashvili break up opposition protests in Tbilisi in November, declare emergency rule, and temporarily shut down all opposition media.

It was a shock for many Western observers accustomed to thinking of Saakashvili as a word-and-deed democracy proponent. Once-robust Western support for Georgia's one-man political show became more measured. By the time January 5 rolled around, many in the West were praising the vote as a victory not for Saakashvili but for Georgian democracy.

Clearly, the time had come to look beyond the man to the country. Western allies are now calling on Saakashvili and the opposition to come together and solve the nation's problems. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Mathew Bryza denied that Washington had "personalized" Georgia's democratic reforms in Saakashvili.

"Our message is to all parties in Georgia, be they in the government or the opposition, that now is the time for the serious and difficult work of building democratic institutions," Bryza said. "The revolution is over. It is time for the rule of law rather than the rule of the street."

The Georgian president appears to agree, and has formally invited his rivals to join him in mapping out a political partnership. "With the opposition in mind, we need to reshuffle the composition of the government

and I believe that we should be much more inclusive and reach out to a broader circle of people," Saakashvili said.

Now that Saakashvili has taken a step toward reconciliation, observers say it is time for the opposition -- some of whom referred to the president as a "fascist" and a "terrorist" during the election campaign -- to follow suit. "I think it is important that [the West] not only put pressure on the government, but also on the opposition to be serious and to take democratic responsibility, which they haven't always done. They have felt as though, being the opposition, they can do whatever they feel like," Cornell says.

### Slower Pace

With the presidential election over, Georgian officials are now looking ahead to April's NATO summit in Bucharest, which should clarify Tbilisi's standing with the alliance, and to parliamentary elections, which are due to be held sometime in the spring.

Prior to Saakashvili's declaration of a state of emergency in November, most observers said Georgia had an outside chance of receiving from NATO a coveted upgrade from Intensified Dialogue status to a Membership Action Plan. But the recent political crisis has made the possibility more remote.

"The big winner in Georgia in the last few months is not Saakashvili," says Lincoln Mitchell, a professor of International Politics at Columbia University specializing in Georgia. "It's Vladimir Putin."

Among its myriad pressures on Tbilisi, Moscow has repeatedly posited that Georgian democracy had been tried and found wanting. The November crisis, Mitchell says, gives a "tremendous amount of fodder" to the Russian argument. The Russians, he adds, "will run with that in ways that are not accurate, not helpful, not good for Georgia."

The United States, along with new NATO members like the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria have traditionally supported Georgia's NATO bid -- despite Russia's opposition. (Germany and France, wary of antagonizing the Kremlin, have been more reluctant.) Bryza says that won't stop now, even as Moscow steps up its claims against Tbilisi.

"Pleasing Russia, or avoiding Russia's displeasure when it comes to NATO enlargement, is not something that drives our policy," he says. "We believe that every European country that aspires to NATO membership and fulfills the criteria should have the door open to NATO membership. We are hoping that Georgia will fulfill those criteria."

### Thaw In The North?

In an apparent effort to improve relations with Moscow, Saakashvili has indicated he will begin his second term as president by putting four years of mutual antagonism behind him and wiping the slate clean. He also extended a personal invitation to Putin to attend his inauguration. Putin has never traveled to Georgia in the capacity of Russian president.

Saakashvili is unlikely ever to win over Russia, regardless of how many olive branches he extends to Putin. And observers say that the best way to overcome the apprehension in Berlin and Paris would be for Georgia to push forward with democratic reforms.

"I believe that the only pressure that Georgia can put on these powers is to continue on the path toward building a consolidated democracy that works no matter who is in power," says Bakur Kvashilava, dean of the School of Law and Politics at the Georgian Center for Public Affairs in Tbilisi.

The good news is that most of the opposition shares Saakashvili's goal of joining NATO and, eventually, the European Union. Some opposition figures in recent days have rejected the idea of NATO membership, perhaps because it is seen as too closely linked to the controversial president. But it remains to be seen

whether such dissent will find purchase, or whether Georgia's long-standing desire to break free of Russian influence will prevail.

With a bit of effort, this could potentially serve as a unifying issue in the upcoming parliamentary elections -- as long as the public is assured that domestic issues ignored in Saakashvili's first term will now be a priority.

"What is the one issue on which these people all agree? This is Euro-Atlantic integration," Cornell says. "So Euro-Atlantic integration is actually one of the areas where it is possible to work for cooperation between the very hostile political forces in Georgia at this point."

### **#33**

#### **Thousands rally in Georgian capital against vote**

**By Margarita Antidze**

**Reuters, January 13, 2008**

Around 35,000 people protested peacefully in the Georgian capital on Sunday against a presidential election they say leader Mikhail Saakashvili rigged.

Many of the demonstrators wore white neck scarves -- a symbol adopted by the opposition after the January 5 election -- and stamped their feet to keep warm in a snow coated central square.

"Saakashvili has rigged the election," Lamara Bliadze said as she listened to the opposition leaders' speeches. "He has to listen to the opinion of the people."

Georgia is a mountainous country about the size of Ireland that sits at the centre of the Caucasus, a volatile region hosting a pipeline pumping oil from the Caspian Sea to Europe, and the scene of a power struggle between the United States and Russia.

Saakashvili, a staunch U.S. ally who came to power in a peaceful 2003 revolution, called the election in November after he ordered police to crush a five day long anti-government protest.

The former Soviet state's central election commission awarded him over 53 percent of the vote, a narrow majority win which means he avoids a second round runoff against his nearest opponent Levan Gachechiladze who polled nearly 26 percent.

Western monitors approved the vote, which they said was competitive and broadly fair despite violations, but the opposition disagreed and said it was fixed.

"Our fight will continue and we will not allow Saakashvili to steal our votes," Gachechiladze told the crowd.

Opposition leaders have been trying to galvanize support since the election by holding a series of protests, but the rallies have attracted smaller turnouts than hoped for and Sunday's protest fell short of the 100,000 predicted.

They promised another rally on Tuesday outside Georgia's main state-controlled broadcaster to demand more air time for the opposition.

Saakashvili has pursued an aggressively pro-Western agenda since sweeping to power, forcing through liberal economic policies and aiming for both NATO and European Union membership for the 4.5 million-strong state.

His reforms have attracted sizeable foreign investment and economic growth of up to 12 percent a year.

But many Georgians say they have missed out on the boom and accuse Saakashvili of running a corrupt, elitist government which has handled the economy poorly.

Analysts have said the election and the protests show how divided the Georgian population has become since electing Saakashvili president with around 96 percent support in 2004.

"Long live Levan," the crowd shouted. "Long live Georgia."

Saakashvili's supporters say the oppositions' accusation that the presidential vote was fixed is just the bleating of desperate opponents who know they have lost.

### **#34**

#### **GAO Questions Program Helping Russians**

**By H. Josef Hebert**

**Associated Press, January 11, 2008**

A U.S. economic aid program to keep Russian scientists from selling weapons information to terrorists apparently funneled much of the money to scientists who never claimed to have a background in nuclear, chemical or biological programs, a congressional report said Friday.

The auditors also found that in many cases assistance went to scientists who were too young to have participated in the Soviet-era weapons programs, instead, helping Russia and Ukraine train new scientists.

The report by the Government Accountability Office urged the Energy Department to overhaul the nuclear nonproliferation program and craft a way to end it. Some Russian officials told the auditors the program is no longer needed, given economic improvements in Russia in recent years.

The department's National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the program, said in a letter attached to the GAO report that the agency viewed the program as justified and will continue to support it. An NNSA spokesman had no additional comment, citing the letter.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, who released the report, said the administration "should undertake a serious review of the program's nonproliferation benefits" and questioned whether its continued funding "makes sense."

"GAO has raised troubling questions about whether a nonproliferation program has perversely funded a younger generation of (Russian) weapons scientists," said Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Created after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, the program - known as the Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention, or IPP - was designed to provide economic assistance and find jobs for Russian scientists involved in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons research. With many of these scientists losing their jobs, the concern was they might use their knowledge to sell information - or themselves - to terrorists.

As of last October, there were 929 IPP projects either completed or at some state of activity involving about 200 facilities in Russia and other former Soviet bloc countries, according to the GAO report. Recently, the program has been expanded to Libya and Iraq, the auditors found.

But the report said the Energy Department has overstated the success of the program both in terms of the number of target scientists that have been helped financially and the number of private-sector jobs that have been created.

The auditors found that of 6,450 scientists in a sample of projects more than half of the scientists paid by the program never claimed to have experience in dealing with weapons of mass destruction - nuclear, chemical, biological - or had the ability to conduct the kind of knowledge transfer the program was aimed at preventing.

While the Energy Department has said that through April 2007, the assistance program had created 2,790 long-term private sector jobs, the auditors found in their review of 48 projects they "were unable to substantiate the existence of many of these jobs."

Also, the auditors found that many of the scientists who received assistance were born in 1970 or later, "making them too young to have contributed to Soviet-era WMD efforts," said the report.

Instead of reducing the risk of critical information being sold to terrorists, the auditors were told by officials at 10 biological and nuclear institutes in Russia and Ukraine that the U.S. program simply helped them attract, recruit and retain younger scientists.

The report said the Energy Department currently is supporting 35 IPP projects at 17 Russian and Ukrainian institutes that the State Department considers no longer needing assistance.

Instead of finding ways to phase out the IPP program, said the GAO, the Energy Department has expanded the program to include assistance to scientists in Libya and Iraq and for programs that support a separate Energy Department initiative, the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP), aimed at expanding use of civilian nuclear power.

### **#35**

#### **Russian-Indian Row Over Tajik Base Suggests Moscow Caught in Diplomatic Vicious Cycle By Stephen Blank EurasiaNet, January 11, 2008**

India's strategic ambitions in Central Asia are in flux after Russia reversed an earlier stance, and now opposes the deployment of Indian military jets to an air base in Tajikistan. Russian displeasure over India's strategic drift toward the United States appears to be the primary reason for the Kremlin's policy shift.

India and Russia have traditionally had cordial relations, underpinned by New Delhi's status as a prime buyer of Russian-made arms and military equipment. These strong ties enabled the Kremlin to sanction India's efforts to establish a strategic beachhead in Central Asia, specifically at a Tajik air base at Ayni, about 15 kilometers outside the capital Dushanbe, and at a medical facility in Farkhor, near the Tajik-Afghan border. India has maintained a presence at the Ayni base since 2002, spending an estimated \$1.77 million on upgrading the facility.

From New Delhi's standpoint, seeking a permanent presence in Central Asia makes both economic and strategic sense. It would improve India's response capability to a crisis in either Afghanistan or Pakistan, as well as potentially help India's efforts to secure wider access to Central Asian energy supplies.

As recently as mid-2006, reports were circulating that New Delhi was on the verge of deploying as many as 12 MiG fighter-bombers at Ayni -- a development that would mark the establishment of India's first military base beyond its borders. The deployment was initially delayed due to problems with India's ability to upgrade Ayni. The base was not capable of accommodating the jets until mid 2007, when renovations were finally completed about two years behind schedule.

At about the same time in 2006 that India was contemplating MiG deployment, Russian and Indian diplomats opened discussions on the possibility of enlarging the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and on India's possible role within the group. [\[For background see the Eurasia Insight archive\]](#). By engaging India, Moscow seemed clearly interested in trying to check rising Chinese influence in Central Asia, especially given China's own efforts to establish a military presence in the region, and for Beijing's refusal to turn the Shanghai Cooperation Organization into a military alliance.

When India was finally ready to proceed with making Ayni fully operational, Russia was having second thoughts. And during the latter half of 2007, Moscow let it be known that it not only opposed Indian deployment, but it also began pressuring President Imomali Rahmon's administration in Dushanbe to

revoke Indian access to the base. About 150 Indian military personnel, mainly engineers and support staff, have been stationed at Ayni.

Russia's policy change, according to analysts, is connected to possible shifts in the international arms market. Available sources in India strongly suggest that Moscow is concerned that New Delhi is becoming too close to the United States in general, and, in particular, too close to US defense firms. Over the next few years India is scheduled to buy \$40 billion in weapons systems from foreign providers, and already it has released a tender for 126 fighter jets. Military aircraft manufacturers, including the US giants Boeing, General Dynamics and Lockheed Martin, have until late February to submit bids. The American firms are competing against Russia's Mikoyan Design Bureau, maker of the "MiG" line of combat aircraft.

Indian sources believe that Moscow's pressure on Dushanbe reflects its anger and apprehension that a valued and long-standing client, namely India, might well turn to Russia's main rival in the weapons business. This would be a significant loss to Russia's defense industry since India has been the Russian defense industry's largest client and longest-serving customer.

Difficulties with recent arms purchases and negotiations have helped spur speculation that India might look elsewhere for weapons. With Moscow's coffers filled with oil money, the Russian military is in the process of giving itself a total make-over after falling into a state of decay following the Soviet collapse in 1991. Russian defense manufacturers are presently having a tough time keeping up with domestic demand, and this is causing serious delays in the meeting of its export obligations to countries like India and China. In addition to delays, Indian officials have reportedly been miffed by the shoddy quality of some recent deliveries, and Russian efforts to drag out ongoing negotiations in order to extract a higher price.

Given the pattern established by Moscow in its energy dealings, the Ayni base matter may well be Russia's not-so-subtle way of threatening New Delhi: Either give Mikoyan the military jet contract, or else kiss the base goodbye.

Beyond attempting to pressure both local governments and third parties outside Central Asia by squeezing their interests there, Moscow's stance toward India betrays growing apprehension about the Kremlin's geopolitical influence in Central Asia. It is clear that Moscow wishes to have controlling influence over the region's political and economic affairs. But after experiencing a rapid rise in its influence in 2005-2006, Russian influence may again be on the ebb, as the region's wealth of energy resources is providing political leaders, especially those in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, with leverage to resist Russian pressure.

As recent energy deals with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan show, it is costing Russia ever more money to obtain energy from Central Asia. Central Asian governments are all increasingly able to conduct a "multi-vector" foreign policy, playing off regional powers -- including Russia, China, the United States, and even India -- for the maximum political and economic benefit.

In Tajikistan's case, Dushanbe does not enjoy anywhere near the same level of foreign policy latitude as has been achieved by some of its bigger neighbors, namely Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Even so, Rahmon's administration has grown more confident in itself over the past few years, as it has managed to establish a tight grip over domestic political life. [\[For background see the Eurasia Insight archive\]](#). Thus, Moscow's efforts to bully India, and by extension Tajikistan, could easily emerge as a source of irritation in Russian-Tajik relations.

Ultimately, the Ayni base issue highlights the fact that Russia may be caught up in a vicious diplomatic cycle, in which it must rely increasingly on coercion in order to get erstwhile loyal friends and neighbors to go along with the Kremlin's economic and strategic wishes. Such a cycle can spin for only so long before it experiences a breakdown.

**#36**

**Same Old Faces Dominate New Kyrgyz Government**

By [Erica Marat](#)

Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 11, 2008

The new Kyrgyz government, formed following the December 16, 2007, parliamentary elections, is comprised mostly of old faces who survived the numerous reshuffling efforts of former president Askar Akayev, the change of presidents in March 2005, and the recent parliamentary elections.

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has surrounded himself in the new government with loyal political supporters primarily interested in the continuity of the current political regime and their public offices. This political clique will be interested in having Bakiyev re-elected in 2010. But the clique's populist and corrupt politics almost certainly will prevent Bakiyev from peacefully and predictably transforming state power.

Most of the new ministers have low popular approval ratings. However, Bakiyev installed his candidates into the government with ease, as his newly formed Ak Zhol political bloc occupies the majority of parliamentary seats. Only two opposition political parties – Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and Ata Meken – are represented in parliament.

The president's choice of Igor Chudinov – a former businessman, director of KyrgyzGaz, and minister of energy – as prime minister came as a surprise for many. The energy sector in Kyrgyzstan is known for its endemic corruption. Chudinov is an ethnic Russian who was able to secure stable positions in public and business structures after Bakiyev came into power. He has already announced a few projects to develop energy sites in the country, but whether he will be able to successfully implement them and curb corruption in the energy sector remains to be seen. Chudinov is the fourth prime minister in Kyrgyzstan since Bakiyev became president in 2005.

Saparbek Balkibekov, former chair of Elektricheskiye stansii, replaced Chudinov at his ministerial position. Under Balkibekov, Elektricheskiye stansii, Kyrgyzstan's major producer and retailer of hydropower, was infamous for having up to \$40 million embezzled every year.

Former Bishkek mayor Arstanbek Nogoyev was appointed minister of agriculture. Nogoyev has been Bakiyev's loyal political follower, notorious for carrying out all of president's orders during his mayoral tenure. He is often ridiculed for his policies of cleaning streets and tearing down buildings after the president expressed his displeasure with the city's appearance.

The new minister of education, Ishengul Bolzhurova, had been a loyal friend of former president Akayev and his family, but she reoriented her support toward Bakiyev's regime in a matter of days.

A number of other ministers, including justice and foreign affairs, had proved their lasting loyalty to Bakiyev before the parliamentary elections and retained their posts.

The current Kyrgyz parliament is full of unprofessional people with uncertain political views. As one political observer in Bishkek comments, despite a better representation of women, ethnic minorities, and young politicians, "The parliament is full of 'dead souls' willing to follow the regime." New Parliamentary Speaker Adakhan Madumarov is known for his populist politics during Akayev and Bakiyev's presidency.

Meanwhile, Bakiyev's opposition has chosen a rather passive position since its defeat in the December 16 elections. Although opposition parties underwent rapid development in the three months prior to the elections, most of them remain silent about the government's widespread falsifications during the elections. Few public protests or media statements have occurred since the elections.

However, the political opposition will gain strength in the coming month if Bakiyev's government is unable to respond to a looming economic crisis. Local experts expect that inflation rates in 2008 in Kyrgyzstan will reach 12-15% due to Uzbekistan's increase of gas prices (from \$100 to \$140 per 1,000 cubic meters) and rising prices for oil and wheat products. However, remittances sent by Kyrgyz migrants in Russia and Kazakhstan, and to a lesser extent from Europe and the United States, will help blunt the economic crisis.

According to the Economist's data for 2006, labor migrants' remittances comprise roughly 32% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP. But the overall economic picture seems murky for Kyrgyzstan in 2008.

In the coming month the opposition might be able to mobilize the population to protest increasing prices for food and utilities. But it is likely that only elections, either parliamentary or presidential, will offer the next possible window of opportunity for the opposition to regroup against the regime. Bakiyev, the new parliament, and new Kyrgyz government members have invested resources and time into attaining offices despite strong opposition competitors. They will not give up their positions easily.

**#37**

**Kyrgyzstan: Authorities Seize Radioactive Material Bound for Iran  
By Bruce Pannier  
Radio Free Europe, January 10, 2008**

Kyrgyz officials announced that they had taken possession of a small load of a radioactive substance discovered aboard a train bound for Iran. The material has been placed in a special area in Kyrgyzstan, but questions are being raised about the nature and quantity of the substance, who was behind its transport, and how the train carrying it crossed three border checkpoints before being detected.

While it might simply be a coincidence that the train was bound for Iran, such a destination is also likely to raise eyebrows, given Western concerns over Tehran's nuclear activities and alleged support of terrorism.

Kyrgyz officials are looking for answers, but their behavior has raised questions, too. Why, for example, did it take them nine days to announce the discovery of the material, which was found on December 31 when radiation detectors alerted Uzbek border guards? They promptly sent the train back to Kyrgyzstan.

The Kyrgyz National Security Service continues to decline comment on that and other questions, and Almabek Aitikeev, a departmental head in the Kyrgyz Emergency Situations Ministry, offered only generalities about the quantity of the material when asked by RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service.

"Not quite a bucket load of radioactive waste material was there mixed in with sand, dust, and snow," Aitikeev said. "We did our work and sealed up the waste on December 31."

**Through Three Border Checks**

Kubanych Noruzbaev, an official from the Kyrgyz Ecology and Environmental Protection Ministry, said on January 10 that the material was cesium-137, a product of nuclear reactors and weapons testing that is often used in medical devices and gauges. But it could also be used in a crude radioactive explosive device -- a "dirty bomb" -- and underscores the fact that despite some progress since 1991, parts of the former Soviet Union are still littered with sites where lethal radioactive materials remain largely unsecured.

Noruzbaev said the cargo train belonged to a Tajik firm but the cargo was loaded by Kyrgyzstan's state railway company, Temir, in Kyrgyzstan with other material and was bound for Iran. Noruzbaev also questioned how the train made it so far before being detected by Uzbek border guards.

"It passed through our border, the Kyrgyz border [and] it passed through two border checkpoints in Kazakhstan, entering and exiting [Kazakhstan]," Noruzbaev said. "Only on the territory of Uzbekistan was it discovered, and they [the Uzbeks] sent the train back to us."

Noruzbaev said the radioactive material should have been discovered long before the train arrived in Uzbekistan. "But how could it happen that it was not detected when it passed through special checkpoints?" Noruzbaev said. "And even more so, how could a [radioactive] source like cesium-137 or -140 pass [without detection]?"

## 'You Would Get Burns'

The Kyrgyz news agency 24.kg reported on January 9 that the levels of radiation being emitted from the train car were so high that the Emergency Situations Ministry asked for volunteers to go and unload the cargo. Four people wearing special protective clothing volunteered to venture into the wagon where they discovered the source of the radiation: dust and waste material on the floor, which they swept up and deposited in a bucket. The bucket was then sealed in concrete and stored in a special facility.

Reports say the material emitted 1,000 milliroentgens per hour, which is considered a dangerous level. Most companies handling such material consider 5,000 milliroentgens per 2,000-hour work year to be the "regulatory upper limit" for safety.

"It emits radiation, radioactive waves, and they are harmful, maybe not in mediocre amounts but prolonged exposure," Noruzbaev said. "If you held it a while, depending on the dosage, you would get burns of varying degrees."

But how did the material make it onto the train? In an interview on January 9 with RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, Emergency Situations Minister Kamchybek Tashiev was vague. "We established a commission immediately after the information about [the radioactive material] became known," Tashiev said. "The commission arrived at the site and removed the radioactive waste according to the law on radioactive security. In such a way, we took every measure to stop the spread of any radioactive substance among the populace."

Kubat Osmonbetov, a geologist, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that cesium-137 and cesium-140 are definitely lethal in large doses. Osmonbetov also noted that there is a uranium-processing plant in northern Tajikistan, raising the possibility that the Tajik train in question may have been used in the past to transport radioactive material and that remains of that material had somehow been left in the wagon.

## #38

### **Moscow Raises Stakes in Iran Game**

**By Pavel K. Baev**

**Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 8, 2008**

In the last days of 2007, Moscow made several purposeful steps that barely registered in the West, where the Christmas break was already well underway. The first step was the delivery of fuel elements to the nearly completed nuclear power station in Bushehr, which could start the reactor perhaps as early as mid-2008 (Rossiiskaya gazeta, December 18; Newsru.com, December 30). The second step was the announcement of a deal to sell Iran five batteries of S-300 surface-to-air missiles for \$800 million (Kommersant, December 27). If followed through, these developments could signify not only a "softening" of Russia's position on the long-unfolding Iran crisis, but a complete collapse of the international efforts aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear program.

Seeking to play this collapse in "slow motion," Moscow has maintained a degree of uncertainty about its Iranian decisions. It has even advanced the argument that the delivery of fuel for the Bushehr reactor should be seen in Tehran as proof of the absence of any "objective need" in its own uranium enrichment program, since its ambitious plans for building many more nuclear power stations could be implemented under standard arrangements for returning the spent fuel to the exporting country. The argument may be sound, but Tehran has given no indication of buying it, while the uninterrupted spinning of the cascades of uranium enrichment centrifuges is conveniently ignored in Moscow (Newsru.com, December 24). This activity constitutes a clear violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1696 and 1737, adopted, respectively, in July and December 2006, but Russia now asserts that the improved cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) makes new resolutions redundant (Nezavisimaya gata, December 20).

The case with selling weapons to Iran is even more muddled. The news about the new contract with Russia was broken by Iranian Defense Minister Mustafa Mohammad-Najjar, who did not specify the time of its

implementation or the quantity of the missiles to be delivered. The Russian Foreign Ministry then vaguely confirmed that cooperation with Iran in air defense matters would continue, unleashing a series of assertive commentary in the Russian media (Lenta.ru, December 27; RIA-Novosti, December 28). However, the Federal Service on Military-Technical Cooperation issued a statement that denied any negotiations with Iran on selling the S-300 missiles (Lenta.ru, December 28). The question may remain in limbo for a few weeks, which could help Moscow measure the scale of concern in Washington and anger in Jerusalem, but the actual delivery could happen very fast, since the “goods” are available from the factory inventory. The deployment of 40-60 mobile launchers of these reasonably efficient missiles in combination with the tactical Tor-M1 surface-to-air missiles delivered in 2006-2007 would significantly strengthen efforts to protect Iranian nuclear assets from a limited air strike.

What prompted Russia to take these pro-active but risky steps in the Iranian game was the new U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that established that Tehran had discontinued its nuclear weapons program. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov clarified that Russian intelligence had no evidence that such a program had been active prior to 2003 and, meeting with his Iranian counterpart Manuchehr Motaki, emphasized the opportunity to resolve all remaining questions. President Vladimir Putin had a meeting with Saeed Jalili, secretary of National Security Council and Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, which signified a breakthrough in sorting out the “misunderstandings” about the delivery of fuel for the Bushehr reactor (RIA-Novosti, December 5, 13). What is possible to discern in these diplomatic activities is not only an eagerness to jump on an opportunity, but also concern that the inevitable reduction of U.S. pressure on Iran might pave the way to a compromise, perhaps to be advanced by the next U.S. administration, and that could lead to all sorts of negative consequences for Russia, including a swift decline in oil prices from the current stratospheric heights of \$100 a barrel.

An additional incentive for rapprochement with Iran is related to the desire to expand arms exports, which reached the record level of \$7 billion in 2007, compared with \$6.5 billion in 2006 (Kommersant, December 25). However, the expectations that the arms industry would demonstrate a new quality of growth were not exactly fulfilled, as most weapons systems in production are still based on the Soviet technologies of the pre-computer era. Several setbacks were registered in 2007, as the much-advertised contracts with Algeria were curtailed and the commitments to deliver the aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov and other naval armaments to India were broken (Lenta.ru, November 28). In fact, taking into consideration the 12% jump in inflation and the ruble’s strong appreciation against the U.S. dollar, it is easy to calculate that the real value of arms traded in 2007 showed a decline, rather than the proudly reported increase.

This hidden retreat is well camouflaged by the massive propaganda offensive trumpeting 2007 as a fantastically successful year, and Putin, in his televised New Year’s address, assured that “Russia has been gaining in strength and becoming stronger.” Self-reassuring as this perception is, it also contains a great deal of wishful thinking, since too many political tests of this strength – from the fight against the deployment of U.S. radars and interceptor-missiles in the Czech Republic and Poland to pressure on Georgia – have delivered negative results. Worried about the fragility of his pseudo-democratic but far from monolithic system of power, Putin increasingly sees the need to juxtapose Russia against the “unfriendly” and even “hostile” West that still remains the pivot of economic relations and political networking. Noting the rise of international tensions in his forecast for 2008, Lavrov insisted that Russia would not be dragged into any confrontation (RIA-Novosti, December 29). Adding fuel to the smoldering conflict around Iran hardly fits into this course of caution, but it is the blind drive to confront the West in order to secure the crumbling domestic stability that shapes up as the main threat to Russia’s security in the uncertain period of Putin-Medvedev duumvirate.