



WASHINGTON, D.C. April 4, 2008

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: NATO puts membership for Ukraine and Georgia on hold; setback for MAUP

Dear Friend,

An extraordinary event took place at this week's NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania. The agenda, well-planned in advance, was thrown off-kilter by the insistent support of the United States and others who favor admitting Ukraine and Georgia to NATO. President George Bush led a full-court effort that, while not successful, did allow for the issue to be revisited at the next NATO meeting in December. The U.S. could not change Germany's position, that now was not the right time to allow Ukraine and Georgia to submit membership action plans. Germany's overarching concern was the negative Russian reaction to initiating a membership process for the two former Soviet republics. Members supporting Ukraine and Georgia said the German position, which was shared by some other NATO members, was tantamount to giving Russia a veto over eligibility for NATO membership. To better understand this difficult and complex issue, we have included several stories and opinion pieces in this week's update that reflect both positions.

There is also a JTA brief on the Ukrainian Supreme Court overturning a lower court's decision that had supported the notoriously anti-Semitic organization MAUP. This is another example of the successful effort by NCSJ and others to get the various branches of the Ukrainian government to counter MAUP's message of hate and intolerance.

Prior to President Bush's visit to Bucharest, he made a brief stop in Kyiv to meet with President Yushchenko and other senior government officials, including the leader of the opposition coalition. It was a goodwill gesture to demonstrate ongoing support for the political and economic reforms in Ukraine, and provided a platform to reiterate U.S. support for Ukraine's admission into NATO.

President Bush also will be meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Russia. We will include more stories and analyses in next week's update on what will probably be their last meeting together as Presidents. As I have written previously, the state of bilateral relations is not good. I and others have suggested that more time and energy is needed on both sides to resolve the many outstanding issues between our two countries, including the difficult democratization and human rights concerns in Russia. The recent meetings in Moscow between senior U.S. and Russian officials and the Sochi meeting is a good start. Let's hope that real progress will result from these discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark B. Levin'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. April 4, 2008

-----INDEX OF ARTICLES-----

1. *NATO: On Georgia And Ukraine, A Meeting Of 'Old' And 'New' Minds*
By Claire Bigg
RFE/RL, April 4, 2008
2. *NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine*
By Steven Erlanger and Steven Lee Myers
New York Times, April 3, 2008
3. *NATO Bows to Russia*
By Matthew Kaminski
Wall Street Journal, April 4, 2008
4. *Putin has a point [re. NATO-Ukraine/Georgia]*
Editorial
Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2008
5. *Bush, Putin at Odds Near End of Terms*
By Matthew Lee
AP, April 4, 2008
6. *Belatedly Making Nice*
Editorial
New York Times, March 31, 2008
7. *Sneak Peek: The Friend of My Enemy*
By Thomas E. Graham
The National Interest, April 1, 2008
8. *Bush lends US support in visit [to Ukraine]*
From staff and wire reports
Kyiv Post, April 3, 2008
9. *Ukraine high court dismisses Jewish case; Construction stopped on Ukrainian cemetery; Germany honors leader of Belarus' Jewish community; Books still inciting national hatred*
JTA and other briefs, March 31-April 3, 2008
10. *Cold War Chill in McCain Remarks on Russia*
By Helene Cooper
New York Times, March 30, 2008
11. *Renouncing anti-Israel remarks, Russian Muslims reach out to Jews*
By Grant Slater
JTA, March 31, 2008

12. *Mufti Ashirov insists on his condemnation of Zionism, respect for Judaism*
Interfax, April 3, 2008
 13. *Tracking Hate Crimes a Tricky Business*
By Matt Siegel
Moscow Times, March 27, 2008
 14. *Ukraine's Chief Picks Big Targets*
She Bucks Moscow, Moguls, Traders; Worry in the West
By Marc Champion
Wall Street Journal, April 2, 2008
 15. *Inadequate migration laws and policies contribute to xenophobia*
Editorial
Kyiv Post, March 27, 2008
 16. *Belarus: Independent Media Targeted By Authorities*
By Michael Scollon
RFE/RL, March 28, 2008
 17. *Belarus Nabs Lawyer to the Oligarchs in Cloak-and-Dagger Affair*
By Marc Perelman
Forward, April 3, 2008
 18. *Dark dance: What is going on in Belarus? And in its ruler's head?*
Editorial
The Economist, April 5-11, 2008
 19. *Moldova's Parliament approves new government*
AP, March 31, 2008
 20. *Reform and Rebuilding: US diplomat says Sargsyan has opportunity to "change the path"*
By John Hughes
ArmeniaNow, March 28, 2008
 21. *4,000 Israelis coming home, but only 80 from Russia*
By Lily Galili
Haaretz, April 4, 2008
-

#1

NATO: On Georgia And Ukraine, A Meeting Of 'Old' And 'New' Minds

By Claire Bigg

RFE/RL, April 4, 2008

Officials from NATO member states headed to the Bucharest summit prepared for a tough fight.

In one camp: the United States and "new" EU members from Central and Eastern Europe pushing strongly to bring Ukraine and Georgia into the military alliance.

In the other: "old" European nations, led by Germany and France, firm in their opposition to granting both NATO hopefuls Membership Action Plans (MAP), a gateway into the alliance.

It wasn't the first time an issue had divided the alliance along "new" and "old" lines. But the debate, conducted in the shadow of mounting Russian resentment, seemed especially acrimonious.

Would Germany and France squeamishly cave in to Moscow's threats? Would the short-sighted newcomers push NATO into a risky standoff with the Kremlin? To be safe, NATO officials had drafted two separate sets of declarations for the summit -- one containing offers of MAPs, the other not.

After a fractious, closed-door debate and a scramble of last-minute deal-making, however, NATO spoke with one voice.

No MAPs would be offered during the summit, it was true. Instead, Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer offered Kyiv and Tbilisi something that many believe was even more valuable: "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO."

Clever Marketing?

De Hoop Scheffer said the two countries' MAP applications will be reviewed at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in December. Speaking in Bucharest on April 4, he reiterated that commitment, saying his words left no "shimmer of a doubt" that Ukraine and Georgia are bound for NATO membership.

The decision -- a "yes" wrapped up in a "no" -- was a feat of clever diplomacy, allowing all sides to claim victory. (Nowhere was this better demonstrated than in Ukraine, where anti-NATO forces celebrated the decision as passionately as President Viktor Yushchenko and other pro-alliance officials.)

It also quieted the rumors of NATO's internal discord, and marked a coup of sorts for the alliance's New Europe contingent, which fought to ensure that the membership guarantee made it into the language of the final agreement.

Karel Schwarzenberg, the foreign minister of the Czech Republic, told RFE/RL in Bucharest that his country, together with Poland and the Baltic States, succeeded in amending an early agreement hammered out between Germany and the United States that dangled the possibility of a MAP in December but included no pledge on membership.

"The first text wasn't that bad. When [Polish Foreign Minister] Radek Sikorsky and I looked at it, we said it is not the dream text, but we could live with it," Schwarzenberg said. "But then the Polish president, Lech Kaczynski, came and said it isn't acceptable for him and the discussion started."

Schwarzenberg said "the Poles led a group, mainly the Baltic States, out of the room" for "a caucus." Once the full meeting reconvened, "this final text came out."

The Upstarts

Asked if it was hard for Germany and France to sign on to the final text, Schwarzenberg said, "I think it was very tough for them, but finally they agreed."

NATO's "new Europe" members might be tempted to view the NATO statement as a sign they have finally edged out the sometimes condescending wing of "old Europe."

The concerns voiced in Germany and France about vexing Moscow by setting Ukraine and Georgia on track for membership had deeply irked many in new NATO states, whose shared history of Soviet domination remains fresh.

Schwarzenberg sought to downplay the divide between old and new. But he acknowledged that officials from the post-Soviet area -- including even Merkel, who grew up in East Germany and who, despite her opposition to the Bucharest MAPs, has generally supported the Georgian and Ukraine bids -- may look at the issue of expansion in a different way.

"I don't think these differences are very big," he said. "It is true that countries that have more recent experience with dictatorships are sometimes more sensitive than countries who never had this experience. Of course, [Germany Chancellor] Angela Merkel is a person who understands such regimes, and has much more instinct for it than many of her Western colleagues, because she knows what she is speaking about."

The last-minute consensus, however, is unlikely to have resolved deep-running differences over the issue.

Some Reservations

Germany and France have repeatedly pointed to Georgia's failure to reassert control over its two separatist provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to the lukewarm public support for NATO membership within Ukraine itself.

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon reiterated earlier this week that accepting both countries into NATO would amount to disrupting the geopolitical balance with Russia.

Germany has a particular interest in maintaining a good working relationship with Russia, a key supplier of oil and gas in Europe, as it is eager to move ahead with the North Stream pipeline that will pump Russian natural gas directly to Germany.

But NATO-watchers say divisions are not uncommon within the 26-member alliance and it should be able to weather this one, too, without much trouble.

"NATO, in its democratic organization, is a very flexible alliance," Alexander Garin, a professor of national security strategy at the German Marshall Center, said. "It's enough to look at the example of Iraq, how much it divided the positions of Western powers -- the United States' allies on the one side, everyone else on the other. All the same, the alliance didn't fall apart. The democratic process lends itself to some chaos; it's not a monolith."

RFE/RL's Russian Service and correspondent Brian Whitmore in Bucharest contributed to this report.

#2

NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine By Steven Erlanger and Steven Lee Myers New York Times, April 3, 2008

President Bush threw the NATO summit meeting here off-script on Wednesday by lobbying hard to extend membership to Ukraine and Georgia, but he failed to rally support for the move among key allies.

Mr. Bush's position — that Ukraine and Georgia should be welcomed into a Membership Action Plan, or MAP, that prepares nations for NATO membership — directly contradicted German and French government positions stated earlier this week. It also risked upsetting efforts to get Russia to soften its opposition to positioning a missile defense array in Eastern Europe.

Mr. Bush failed to win over a consensus of NATO members in a debate at a dinner of NATO leaders, a senior German official said Wednesday night, with at least seven countries lined up against him.

A senior American official, briefing reporters, said that no final decisions had been made at the dinner, and that all parties agreed on the importance of keeping the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's door open to Ukraine and Georgia.

Mr. Bush, entering his last NATO summit meeting as president, was described by the official as wanting to "lay down a marker" for his legacy and not wanting to "lose faith" with the Ukrainian and Georgian peoples and the other former Soviet republics. As Mr. Bush did more often early in his presidency, he expressed his views candidly despite warnings from allies that he was complicating efforts to find diplomatic solutions.

Normally, summit meetings like this are prescribed, but Mr. Bush's comments added some extra interest while annoying Germany and France, which had said they would block the invitation to Ukraine and Georgia.

At the dinner on Wednesday, the German and French position was supported by Italy, Hungary and the Benelux countries, a senior German official said. Mr. Bush was said to have accepted that his position was not going to prevail, and officials were asked to find some construction overnight that would encourage Ukraine and Georgia without asking them to enter a membership plan now.

The dinner meeting ran two hours over schedule. An hour and a half after it was supposed to end, Laura Bush, the first lady, left on her own, as did other spouses.

"The debate was mostly among Europeans," the senior administration official said, acknowledging that several allies had balked at President Bush's stance. "It was quite split, but it was split in a good way."

NATO members did appear to make progress on other issues on their agenda. They are set on inviting Croatia and Albania to join the alliance, while working to overcome Greek objections to extending membership to Macedonia, European and American officials said.

France also offered to send a battalion of troops to eastern Afghanistan, a move that could free American forces to move south, where NATO troops are struggling to suppress the Taliban-led insurgency.

On Wednesday morning, Mr. Bush gave a rousing speech in which he stated his positions and declared that "the terrorist threat is real, it is deadly and defeating this enemy is the top priority of NATO," which is not the defined goal of every member of this collective security alliance.

Referring to democratic revolutions in both Ukraine and Georgia, he said: "Welcoming them into the Membership Action Plan would send a signal to their citizens that if they continue on the path to democracy and reform they will be welcomed into the institutions of Europe. It would send a signal throughout the region" — read Russia — "that these two nations are, and will remain, sovereign and independent states."

Some German officials described the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, as upset and even angry on Wednesday. She and Mr. Bush have talked repeatedly about the issue in the past two months. Mrs. Merkel had thought that a compromise was in the works, the officials said, with Washington supporting a warm statement welcoming the interest of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO and encouraging them to work toward entering the membership plan program.

Germany and France have said they believe that since neither Ukraine nor Georgia is stable enough to enter the program now, a membership plan would be an unnecessary offense to Russia, which firmly opposes the move. In fact, senior diplomats here said, the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, has threatened to cancel his planned first-ever visit to the NATO meeting on Friday if the two former Soviet states enter the program for eventual membership.

Mrs. Merkel visited Moscow on March 8 and met Mr. Putin and his successor, Dmitri A. Medvedev. She told them that Russia would not be allowed a veto over NATO membership. But a senior German diplomat, Wolfgang Ischinger, said that offering membership to a divided Ukraine could destabilize the new government there, and that not enough diplomacy had taken place beforehand with Russia.

Mr. Ischinger, Germany's ambassador to London, noted that after the NATO summit meeting Mr. Bush and the two Russians would meet in Sochi, a Russian resort on the Black Sea. He said, "It's the absence of this discussion that makes me wonder if NATO has done enough of its homework at this point on this front."

The newer members of NATO from the old Eastern Europe support the American position. Romanian, Estonian and Latvian leaders emphasized that the Membership Action Plan program involved difficult requirements for NATO membership, including internal political and military reforms and guarantees of civil liberties, and could take a decade to fulfill.

"MAP is more of a big stick than a big carrot," said the Estonian president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at a conference here of the German Marshall Fund. "It forces nations to reform even when they don't want to do it."

The Latvian president, Valdis Zatlers, warned that postponing entry to the Membership Action Plan program delayed crucial internal debates. "No action plan, no action," he said. "If we delay, we postpone the inevitable. We have to give MAP."

Ronald D. Asmus, who was a crucial figure in the Clinton administration's enlargement of NATO and now runs the German Marshall Fund's Brussels office, said, "Bush's speech set up a dramatic battle that will be fought out over the next two days and whose outcome will be important in shaping his legacy, and America's diplomatic standing in the alliance."

Derek Chollet, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington, said Mr. Bush's speech was "a combination of valedictory and marker-laying." Mr. Bush will probably lose the argument on Ukraine and Georgia, Mr. Chollet said. "But he doesn't care so much, and he believes he's on the right side of the issue."

Getting NATO support for more troops in Afghanistan and for a limited European missile-defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic is probably more important to Mr. Bush before the meeting with Mr. Putin, Dr. Asmus and Mr. Chollet said.

In his speech, Mr. Bush urged the alliance to "maintain its resolve and finish the fight" in Afghanistan and to deploy more troops there to combat the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other threats around the world.

With the war in Afghanistan now in its seventh year, and 47,000 NATO troops already there, Mr. Bush stressed the continuing threat of terrorism to the entire West. In addition to France's commitment announced Wednesday, Poland and Romania will also send more troops, and Washington is sending 3,200 more marines.

But a full accounting of any additional forces will not be clear until Thursday; Canada had said it would consider pulling its troops out of the dangerous southern region of Afghanistan unless other countries provided 1,000 more soldiers.

#3

NATO Bows to Russia

By Matthew Kaminski

Wall Street Journal, April 4, 2008

European security is supposed to be last century's problem. Tell that to Ukraine and Georgia, who had their bids to cast their future lot with the West vetoed by Russia at this week's unusually dramatic summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

George W. Bush had pushed for the world's premier military alliance to crack open its doors to Georgia and Ukraine. His inability to get NATO to stand up to Russia (and its enabler – Germany) tarnishes his one indubitably positive legacy in Europe.

Back in the summer of 2001, before the "Bush Doctrine" was born from the embers of 9/11, the president pledged to make the spread of freedom across the Continent his priority. Soon after, he welcomed seven former Soviet satellites, including Romania, into NATO. Washington then backed the democratic "color" revolutionaries in Ukraine and Georgia.

The fight in Bucharest was over the right of these longtime Russian vassals to leave their past behind. Ukraine and Georgia made their choice clear, asking for "membership action plans" (MAPs) at the alliance. As the acronym suggests, this preliminary but symbolically important agreement maps out a path to possibly join

NATO. Without any cost or obligation for the alliance, a MAP would have put these countries on a Westernizing track.

Mr. Putin hates virtually every U.S. strategic initiative in Europe from the independence of Kosovo to installing missile defenses. But Russia has no direct interests in Kosovo and knows limited missile defenses pose no threat. MAPs, on the other hand, matter. Georgia is a pro-American thorn in Russia's side. And as the largest ex-Soviet republic bar Russia, Ukraine is a coveted prize. Lacking any natural allies, Russia is desperate to keep these states in its sphere of influence.

U.S. diplomacy moved late on Ukraine and Georgia. The Pentagon and State Department preferred to focus on securing a Russian OK on missile defense first. By the time Mr. Bush put on an emotional full-court press this week, Chancellor Angela Merkel had dug in. Mr. Bush, who gets along well with the German leader, couldn't sway her in several phone calls and over dinner and lunch yesterday in Bucharest.

Germany is the new France. As the current leader in Paris, Nicolas Sarkozy, buries the old Gaullist skepticism about America and NATO, Berlin takes on the role of troublesome ally. Former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder is on Russian energy giant Gazprom's payroll these days, heading up its big pipeline construction project across the Baltic. But Schröderism lives on. In the unwieldy left-right coalition government, Ms. Merkel's foreign minister is her predecessor's chief of staff.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, according to a senior German official, claims Mr. Putin had to swallow hard on Kosovo, and losing Ukraine and Georgia would upset Moscow too much. This official said Ms. Merkel, who grew up in communist East Germany and holds few illusions about Putin's Russia, didn't want to pick a fight with her governing partners with elections only about a year away. A stronger Merkel might have acted differently in Bucharest.

Mr. Putin today flies in for lunch at his first NATO summit, and will surely be in good spirits. No matter how hard the alliance spins, the impression in Russia and the world beyond is indisputable. Moscow finally got a big say over an internal NATO decision.

"Next time we try have to invoke Article V (the alliance's self-defense clause) do we need to ask Russia's permission first?" deadpanned Mart Laar, the former Estonian prime minister. Across Eastern Europe, the sight of Germany and Russia together deciding the fate of the countries in between sends historical shivers down spines.

Georgian officials fear that an emboldened Russia will press its advantage from Bucharest against President Mikhail Saakashvili, perhaps by stoking violence in the breakaway region of Abkhazia. That may sound paranoid. But considering the Kremlin's record in the Caucasus, it's perfectly plausible. The recently formed government of Yulia Tymoshenko, who was one of the leaders of Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, will take a hit from this public rejection by the West.

The Russian victory in Bucharest doesn't have to stand. The decision on Ukraine and Georgia is supposed to be reviewed within the year, and for NATO's credibility the sooner the better.

But let's not forget the bigger picture either. Although the Bush administration has often been accused of destroying the trans-Atlantic alliance, the outlook in this last year of his presidency looks promising, German domestic politics notwithstanding. Mr. Bush was lucky to outlast the Schröder-Chirac duo, and to see new leaders come into power in Berlin and Paris who understand that Europe has no serious alternative to a close military alliance with the U.S.

Mr. Sarkozy this week signaled his desire to bring France back into NATO's military wing next year, and led the way in promising to replenish the alliance's difficult mission in Afghanistan with fresh troops. The burden can be shared better there, but as always was the case in NATO during the Cold War, the U.S., Britain and a few others tend to carry most of it. The American president can also take comfort in the alliance's endorsement yesterday for another Bush legacy project, a missile defense shield. It gives Poland and the Czech Republic political cover to put interceptors and radars on their territory.

As for that vision thing, whoever follows Mr. Bush will likely crib without attribution from his speech here on Wednesday. About to enter its seventh decade, NATO is on a difficult but worthy journey, in his words, from a "static" to "an expeditionary alliance that is sending its forces across the world to help secure a future of freedom and peace for millions."

What binds members isn't treaty obligations as much as a common civilization. The threat today comes chiefly from terrorism, an assessment shared, if stated more quietly, by France, the U.K. and other European countries. And though Mr. Bush insisted that "Russia is not our enemy," for most members of NATO the Putin regime's aggressiveness has strengthened the case for the alliance's continued eastward expansion (today's Germany being the exception).

What a shame if the step backward in Bucharest ends up distracting the U.S., for all its other global obligations, from finishing what it started in Europe with the collapse of the Berlin Wall now almost a generation ago. "This is an alliance that needs to be led," said a European NATO official. Only America qualifies for the role.

Mr. Kaminski is editorial page editor of The Wall Street Journal Europe.

#4

Putin has a point [re. NATO-Ukraine/Georgia]

Editorial

Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2008

The Russian president opposes Bush's push to expand NATO eastward, and he's right.

It isn't often that we take Vladimir V. Putin's side on issues of international governance, but the bellicose Russian president is right about the matter expected to dominate this week's NATO summit: Ukraine and Georgia don't belong in the alliance. At least not yet.

President Bush spent Tuesday in Ukraine talking up that country's membership bid, part of an ongoing administration strategy backing NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe. For Bush, a larger NATO means more potential allies willing to contribute troops to the struggle in Afghanistan, still largely an American project despite the alliance's approval of the invasion. With much of Western Europe deeply reluctant to put its soldiers in harm's way, the East represents the best hope for relieving the pressure on U.S. forces. But that short-term benefit has to be balanced against the many long-term problems associated with an expanded NATO.

In the first place, there's the fact that the larger the organization grows, the more unwieldy it becomes. NATO's decisions are made by consensus, which is far harder to achieve as it adds members with broadly divergent security interests. For an example of the institutional paralysis likely to result, see the United Nations.

Second, adding Ukraine and Georgia to the 26-member alliance would needlessly antagonize Russia. Moscow and the West made an implicit deal amid the collapse of the Soviet Union: Russia would allow German reunification and pull its troops out of Eastern Europe as long as NATO didn't expand eastward. The betrayal of that trust infuriates and frightens the Russian people, fueling nationalism and insecurity that have strengthened the current autocratic regime. With the Cold War imperative of containing Russia now long outdated, there is no compelling security reason to add former Soviet republics to the alliance, while doing so harms our relations with a country whose support is critical in resolving dangerous conflicts with Iran and other nations.

Lastly, the two potential members come with serious risks attached. Both are young, and not entirely stable, democracies riddled with corruption and internal dissent. The majority of the Ukrainian people oppose membership, and Georgia is rent by a secession movement in two pro-Russia regions. Not many Americans

would favor sending their sons to die defending Tbilisi, but that's precisely what they would be committed to do with Georgia in the alliance.

The door should not be slammed in their faces, but neither the two countries themselves, nor Russia, nor NATO is ready for them to start on the path to membership. Let's talk in 2010.

#5

Bush, Putin at Odds Near End of Terms

By Matthew Lee

AP, April 4, 2008

ZAGREB, Croatia — President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin, short-time leaders in a period of rising tension, tried to stress cooperation Friday as they headed toward the final face-to-face diplomacy of their presidencies. Both declared there is no Cold War, but conflicts over security remained.

Finished with the NATO summit in Bucharest, Bush shifted to Croatia for an overnight stay and meetings on Saturday before heading to Russia to see Putin. In all, the two leaders were to meet three times in three days, capping a relationship that has lasted nearly a decade.

Putin is leaving office next month; Bush's term ends in January.

Bush and Putin have been at odds over NATO's expanding membership and a U.S.-based missile defense plan in Europe. Yet in a meeting with leaders on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Romania, Putin shrugged off allegations that the world is sliding toward a new East-West divide.

The Russian leader told reporters that his message to Bush and other leaders was "Let's be friends, guys, and engage in an honest dialogue."

Bush said he and Putin were "two old warhorses" who were getting ready to step down, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting. Bush emphasized the need for cooperation and said Russia is not the enemy, the official said.

Bush found Putin's tone to be constructive and matter-of-fact, the official said.

To reporters, Putin appeared to question the purpose of NATO in the post-Soviet Union era, even as he stressed Russia's willingness to cooperate with the alliance if its concerns are heard among its leaders.

"The efficiency of our cooperation will depend on whether NATO members take Russia's interests into account," he said.

He strongly criticized expansion plans supported by Bush and many other NATO members that would include in the military alliance former Soviet republics. Ukraine and Georgia were not allowed at this meeting to start on the path to membership, but leaders made clear they would be eventually and that prospect angers Moscow.

"The emergence of the powerful military bloc at our borders will be seen as a direct threat to Russia's security," Putin said. "I heard them saying today that the expansion is not directed against Russia. But it's the potential, not intentions that matters."

Bush's meeting at Putin's vacation home, at the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi on Saturday and Sunday, is expected to be their last as presidents.

Yet under Russia's new power-sharing agreement, Putin's hand-picked successor, Dmitry Medvedev, will be sworn in as president on May 7 — and Putin, his stern mentor and predecessor, will serve under him as prime minister. In recent years, Putin has moved to consolidate his power and control of Russia.

Bush goes into the meetings having won NATO backing to install a missile shield in the former Soviet eastern European satellites of Poland and the Czech Republic over Russian objections.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called it a "breakthrough agreement" for the military alliance, and it was sugarcoated by the announcement of a U.S. deal with the Czech Republic to host a radar site vital to the missile defense system.

But Bush lost, at least for the moment, a highly public spat over opening the door to NATO membership to Ukraine and Georgia, which Putin vehemently opposes. Instead of the immediate start to that process that he wanted, Bush got a written commitment from the allies, including Germany and France, which shared Russian concerns, that the two nations will become NATO members at some point. Bush plans to continue to press the matter.

On missile defense, Russia views the system as designed to weaken its military might and upset the balance of power in Europe. Bush argues that the shield is not aimed at Russia but at Mideast countries such as Iran. In a series of concessions, the White House has offered to let Moscow monitor the sites and promised to delay activation of the shield until Iran or another adversary tests a missile capable of reaching Europe.

#6

Belatedly Making Nice

Editorial

New York Times, March 31, 2008

George Bush and Vladimir Putin, after months of acrimony and years of inaction, are suddenly ready to talk seriously about serious matters. We hope it is not too late, since both are nearly at the end of their presidencies. There are certainly a lot of things they need to address.

For one, nuclear weapons. Since they agreed on the 2002 Moscow Treaty — which will bring both sides down to between 1,700 and 2,200 fielded weapons — there have been no talks about any deeper cuts or reductions in the thousands of weapons they keep as back up.

For another, Mr. Putin's authoritarian and bullying ways — at home and abroad. Mr. Bush has limited leverage, but his limitless passion for an unproven missile defense system has made it easier for the Russian leader to deflect criticism.

And then there is Iran. While the two presidents have spent months trading barbs, Tehran has been defying the Security Council and mastering the skills it needs to make its own nuclear weapon.

The idea for a new "strategic framework" is Mr. Bush's. He is clearly looking for a better foreign policy legacy than just the disastrous Iraq war. He has twice sent his secretaries of state and defense to Moscow to sell the idea, and will travel to the Black Sea resort of Sochi this weekend to discuss it with Mr. Putin.

Mr. Bush is especially eager to expand his grandiose vision for missile defense, including a European-based system in Poland and the Czech Republic. The technology isn't close to being ready and will pose no threat to Russia's huge arsenal. But that hasn't stopped Moscow from objecting and using it as an excuse for anti-American bluster and its serial misbehavior.

Belatedly, Mr. Bush has offered concessions, like allowing Moscow to monitor the system and agreeing not to activate it until there is a verifiable threat from Iran or some other hostile state. The Russians still haven't dropped their opposition. If Mr. Bush wants a deal now, he will have to give more, such as agreeing not to deploy interceptors until a threat is verified.

Mr. Bush has finally agreed to extend or replace Start I, which expires in 2009. What matters is that this treaty sets the rules for verifying each side's compliance with arms control commitments (and not incidentally also

gives American monitors information on whether the Russians are doing what they should to secure their weapons). Mr. Bush's contempt for treaties was so great that he apparently was willing to give that up.

Unfortunately, Mr. Bush is not proposing deeper cuts in nuclear weapons. In a post-cold-war world it is impossible to justify the need for thousands of weapons. And Mr. Bush's stubborn refusal gives far too many countries a further excuse to ignore Iran's misbehavior and to justify their own nuclear appetites.

Mr. Bush should be commended for trying to put the relationship with Russia on a better track. But he waited too long to make the effort and remains too wedded to cold-war fears to chart a truly new course. The next American president will have to do a lot better.

#7

Sneak Peek: The Friend of My Enemy

By Thomas E. Graham

The National Interest, April 1, 2008

Thomas Graham, senior director for Russia at the National Security Council from 2004 to 2007, offers advice to Presidents Bush and Putin before their meeting on Sunday. This is taken from his forthcoming article, "The Friend of My Enemy," that will appear in the May/June 2008 issue of The National Interest.

What sort of agenda might lead to an improvement in U.S.-Russia relations? Post the NATO summit can they do more than paper over missile defense, Iran and energy? There are ... steps we could take immediately that bear directly on how Moscow sees its interests in and with Iran and that could change the cost-benefit analysis in favor of closer cooperation with the United States.

Four stand out:

First, conclusion of the 123 Agreement [an agreement that clears the way for cooperation on civilian nuclear projects]. The agreement was initialed last summer, with final signature pending required reports from U.S. agencies on Russia's nuclear policies. Not surprisingly, those reports have become caught up in the ongoing debate inside the administration over Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran. The same forces that opposed closer cooperation with Russia in the first term are fighting a rearguard action now. But holding out the agreement in return for Russian good behavior is a nonstarter, as it was in the first term. To the contrary, signing this agreement is critical to convincing the Russians that we are serious about closer cooperation and the commercial rewards that will accrue to both the United States and Russia. The agreement is only a framework agreement, and separate agreements will have to be reached for each specific cooperative project. But without the agreement, talk of additional concrete cooperation is just that, talk. With [an agreement], various entities [both Russian and American] can begin to move on concrete projects that would far outweigh the benefit of cooperation with Iran. Steps toward a joint U.S.-Russian commercial venture to build proliferation-resistant reactors in third countries would not only hold out the prospect of great commercial gains, but they could also reassure Moscow that it would not be pushed out of the Iranian nuclear-reactor market should relations between Iran and the United States ever normalize.

Second, more intense efforts to work jointly with the Russians on missile defense. As Henry Kissinger has pointed out, Putin's proposal on missile defense—in essence to link U.S. and Russian systems in some way—could be nothing more than a tactical maneuver to split the NATO allies and undermine U.S. efforts to deploy elements of a system in Poland and the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, he has argued, we need to explore Putin's proposal seriously, because if we could find a way to work together, that would mark a strategic revolution and would place the issue of Iran in a radically different—and more promising—framework. Although the discussions have proceeded with fits and starts, and significant distance still divides the two sides, it is far too early to abandon negotiations. Continued discussions in themselves are an element of pressure on Tehran. One starting point for further cooperation could be a joint investigation of the missile threat from Iran, something that would only add to the pressure.

Third, recalibration of the rhetoric on Europe's energy dependence on Russia. The administration has hammered away on the downsides of this dependence. Every time Russia announces a pipeline deal involving the European market, the administration cannot resist pointing to its own—so far unsuccessful—efforts to build support for an alternative. But the truth is that Europe will need every bit of energy it can get from Russia to meet future demand and then some. The more pragmatic approach would be to welcome growing Russian supplies to Europe and Russian involvement on commercial terms in Europe's energy sector, while still underscoring the pressing need for other sources—and therefore additional pipelines. We should make clear that if Iranian gas ever flows to European markets, we would not be opposed to Russian equity participation in such ventures.

Fourth, graduation of Russia from Jackson-Vanik. The administration is inclined to wait until Russia is on the verge of entering the World Trade Organization (WTO) before taking this step. Once Russia is in the WTO, the amendment will work against U.S. business interests, and the administration calculates that introducing it then will reduce the political cost of persuading Congress to act favorably on Jackson-Vanik. Russia could be ready to enter the WTO later this year, but the administration would gain some goodwill and enhance its credibility in Moscow by beginning the push now and following through even if Russia's entry is delayed.

None of these steps are concessions to the Russians or a reward for bad behavior, as some would have it. All would impact Russia's cost-benefit analysis on Iran. In the end, they may prove too little to move Moscow toward significantly closer cooperation on Iran given the overall state of U.S.-Russian relations and the deep distrust and suspicion on both sides. All, however, are profoundly in our own national interest, even absent our concerns about Iran. As a general rule, we should be prepared to accommodate Russian interests where we can without jeopardizing our own. Surely, we should be prepared to pursue our own interests if that would also accommodate Russia's and increase the chances that Russia would work more closely with us and our European partners in pressuring Iran to abandon its nuclear-weapons program.

#8

Bush lends US support in visit [to Ukraine]

From staff and wire reports

Kyiv Post, April 3, 2008

To demonstrate full US support for extending Ukraine a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), US President George W. Bush paid his first official visit to Ukraine on April 1 and challenged NATO leaders to resist pressure from the Russian Federation.

"As every nation in the world told me, Russia will not have a veto over what happens in Bucharest, and I take their word for it," Bush told a morning Kyiv press conference. "And that's the right policy to have."

Bush visited Ukraine just as the French and German governments declared they would not support extending Ukraine and Georgia MAPs at the April 2 to 4 Bucharest summit because they view the nations as unstable and their institutions not yet meeting Euro-Atlantic standards.

Critics allege the French and Germans are buckling to economic and political pressure from Russia, firmly opposed to Ukrainian and Georgian MAPs, though the Italian, Norwegian and Spanish governments also voiced resistance.

French leaders didn't hide the Russian influence in its decision-making, even stating Moscow should be consulted.

"France will not give its green light to the entry of Ukraine and Georgia," said French Prime Minister Francois Fillon. "We think this is not the correct response to the balance of power in Europe, and between Europe and Russia."

Meanwhile, The Washington Post columnist Jim Hoagland reported this week that German Chancellor Angela Merkel assured Russian President Vladimir Putin during her early March visit to Russia that she will block the US drive for a Ukrainian MAP.

Europe is highly dependent on Russian natural gas imports, receiving a quarter of its supply from Gazprom. Many analysts believe Russia is increasingly using its energy might as a political lever against its neighbors.

The summit could mark the first time that a non-member is able to influence the alliance's voting, said Vladimir Socor, a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation in Washington.

In his morning press conference with Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, Bush said a Ukrainian MAP would advance security in the region and throughout the world, but Russian leaders were quick to disagree.

Ukraine's accession would cause a "deep crisis" in its relations with Moscow and would badly hurt Western relations with Russia, said Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin.

The US president's visit stirred the political waters in Moscow, which claims NATO is encroaching on its sphere of influence through its eastward expansion, which already includes the former Soviet states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that were accepted in 2004.

Earlier this year, Putin said Russia would point its missiles at Ukraine if it became a NATO member.

Bush, who will meet with Putin on April 6, denied at the press conference claims the US might soften its push to get Ukraine and Georgia into NATO if Russia backs off its opposition to a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe, basing missiles in Poland and a radar tracking station in the Czech Republic.

"There's no trade-offs," he said. "Period."

Russian members of parliament (MP) said they would re-consider the bilateral Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership Agreement their country and Ukraine ratified in 1999. Ukraine entering a MAP would violate the agreement's clause that forbids joining any international organizations that damages the interests of the other partner, said Konstantin Zatulin, a Russian MP.

"Ukraine's NATO aspiration is a direct violation of the agreement and doesn't conform with the spirit and the letter of this document," he said.

In promoting MAP to the Ukrainian people, their pro-Western leaders stressed the program is not NATO membership. MAP would require Ukraine to upgrade its military and strengthen democratic institutions before gaining admission.

Meanwhile at the summit, NATO is poised to offer full membership to Croatia, Albania and maybe Macedonia.

Extending Ukraine a MAP has divided NATO, with its nine East European members, often referred to as "New Europe," siding with the US.

Yushchenko will arrive at the summit on April 3, and attend the Ukraine-NATO Commission meeting on April 4, which will discuss and vote on extending Ukraine the MAP.

"For the last 80 years, Ukraine has declared its independence six times, and five times it failed," Yushchenko said at Bush's side in Kyiv.

NATO membership for Ukraine should not be viewed as a threat to Moscow, he added.

"This is not a policy against somebody," the Ukrainian president said. "We are taking care of our national interest."

A unanimous vote excluding abstentions is necessary, and Bush and Yushchenko will invest their time leading up to the commission meeting negotiating with French and German leaders.

"I wouldn't prejudge the outcome just yet," Bush said.

Spending nearly a full day in Kyiv, Bush discussed MAP prospects with Yushchenko, energy concerns with Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Euro-Atlantic integration with opposition leader Viktor Yanukovich, who represents the majority of Ukrainians in opposing the MAP, news reports said.

Yanukovich repeated to Bush the Party of the Regions of Ukraine's policy – it supports EU-integration, but it favors NATO integration only after a nationwide referendum, news reports said.

Television reports described security as unprecedented for the Ukrainian capital, with 4,000 police officers employed to secure roads and the city center for the visit.

Much of downtown Kyiv was shut down on April 1, though a few thousand anti-NATO demonstrators took to Independence Square to wave Communist-era flags and banners in protest of the US president's visit.

They were forbidden to approach the five-star Hyatt Regency hotel on Kyiv's ancient Volodymyrskyi Passage where the Bushes spent the night. Access to the US Embassy of Ukraine, where they staged a demonstration on March 31, was also blocked on April 1.

The US president's visit wasn't all about business, visiting a local high school in the afternoon. He was accompanied by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who chatted with the high school students and helped them brush up on their English.

Meanwhile, First of Lady of Ukraine Kateryna Yushchenko, a native of Chicago, accompanied US First Lady Laura Bush to the National Taras Shevchenko Museum on Shevchenko Boulevard in Kyiv. Both presidential couples also visited the Holodomor Famine-Genocide Memorial at St. Michael's Square, placing wreaths.

Barely staying 24 hours, the visit was Bush's first to Ukraine in his eight-year presidency, dominated by the Iraq War. His predecessor, Bill Clinton, visited Ukraine three times during his presidency.

Bush's father visited Ukraine amid the collapse of the USSR delivering his August 1991 Chicken Kiev speech, which warned of "suicidal nationalism." Weeks later Ukraine's parliament declared independence, and citizens upheld this move overwhelmingly in a referendum later that year.

#9a

Ukraine high court dismisses Jewish case JTA Brief, March 31, 2008

Ukraine's Supreme Court dismissed a case against a Jewish organization.

The Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, or MAUP, Ukraine's largest private university based in Kiev, lost in its bid to sue the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine and its publication The Jewish Observer over articles written two years ago about MAUP activities directed against the Jewish community and Zionism.

A lower court had rejected the original lawsuit, and the Appeals Court of Ukraine found in favor of MAUP.

The MAUP, whose leaders have a long history of anti-Semitism, has published anti-Semitic articles in school and national publications, as well as hosted and supported anti-Semitic conferences.

#9b

Construction stopped on Ukrainian cemetery JTA Brief, April 3, 2008

U.S. intervention prevented building on the site of an old Jewish cemetery in Ukraine.

Authorities in Vinnitza, 160 miles from Kiev, had allowed the SMU-2 Ltd. construction firm to erect two high-rise buildings on the site.

U.S. officials on Thursday told JTA that the embassy intervened and the work order was stopped.

A local rabbi earlier told JTA that representatives of the local Jewish community planned to express their concern in a letter to city and national leaders.

Igor Kulyavtzev, the acting chair of the Vinnitza Jewish community, said workers building a Christian chapel recently near the cemetery site dismantled several tombstones. City residents reportedly used some of the stones for their own needs.

#9c

Germany honors leader of Belarus' Jewish community Naviny.by, April 2, 2008

Leonid Levin, chairman of the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Associations and Communities, has been awarded a state German prize, the Knight's Cross of Merits, in recognition for his contribution to the reconciliation between the Belarusian and German nations.

The awarding ceremony was held at the Minsk-based German embassy on Wednesday.

German Ambassador Gebhardt Weiss noted that Mr. Levin was a representative of the generation that had both the memory of Nazi crimes during WWII and a will to build a common future in Europe, according to the embassy's press office.

"Memory, mutual understanding and reconciliation also are reflected in Levin's works of art and architecture," the embassy said. "Many of his memorial complexes, including in Khatyn, Minsk and Volgograd, are a bright reminder of horrible events and people's sufferings, as well as a warning to the present generation."

The embassy said that Mr. Levin also had close ties with Germany and was a member of the guardian council of the Johannes Rau International Educational Center (IBB) in the Belarusian capital city

#9d

Books still inciting national hatred Baltic Times, April 3, 2008

Reminiscent of fifty years ago, books are still inciting national hatred in Latvia.

At the bookstore Pa Rokai, books such as, Protocols of Zion, Russian Gods Blow, God's Nation, Protocols of Soviet Wise, and other books with anti-Semitic contents are sold.

Latvian Security Police spokeswoman Kristine Apse-Krumina said: "There is no forbidden books list in Latvia," which is why any publication can reach the shelves. The books may be withdrawn as a result of criminal procedure only.

The shop assistant confirmed over the telephone that all of the mentioned books, including the ones written by Russian national radical Grigory Klimov could still be purchased at the shop.

To determine whether the publication incites national hatred, expert analysis is required.

The Security Police plans to look in to the case of the aforementioned books.

#10

Cold War Chill in McCain Remarks on Russia

By Helene Cooper

New York Times, March 30, 2008

Senator John McCain made clear this week that for him, Europe ends at the border with Russia.

Mr. McCain, an Arizona Republican, struck a conciliatory tone during his foreign policy speech in Los Angeles on Wednesday, outlining a set of international principles in which an America under his guidance would abandon President Bush's go-it-alone approach and make nice with its allies.

"Recall the words of our founders in the Declaration of Independence, that we pay 'decent respect to the opinions of mankind,'" Mr. McCain said. "Our great power does not mean we can do whatever we want whenever we want, nor should we assume we have all the wisdom and knowledge necessary to succeed."

His words were an olive branch offered across the Atlantic Ocean, meant primarily for Europe. For Russia, though, Mr. McCain was flinging rocks.

Mr. McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, used his strongest and most bellicose words in describing his views of Russia. He called for throwing Russia out of the Group of Eight, the club that is supposed to be made up of the world's wealthiest industrialized democracies. (Brazil and India, Mr. McCain said, should be allowed in, while Russia would get the boot.) He accused Russia of "nuclear blackmail" and "cyber attacks." And, he added, "Western nations should make clear that the solidarity of NATO, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, is indivisible and that the organization's doors remain open to all democracies committed to the defense of freedom."

Whew.

For many Americans, Mr. McCain's rhetoric sounded almost like a trip back in time, to the days of the cold war, when major foreign policy addresses by American presidential aspirants always included the requisite bashing of the Soviet Union.

Foreign policy experts say that in many ways, Mr. McCain's strong words about Russia reflect a chill setting in on the previously warm relationship which President Bush purportedly had with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir V. Putin. Forget about Mr. Bush's now-famous remark that, upon meeting Mr. Putin back in 2001, he "looked the man in the eye" and "was able to get a sense of his soul."

These days, the Bush administration is spending a lot of time trying to manage what some administration officials now refer to as their Russia problem. Mr. Putin's opposition to the Bush administration's missile defense plans; his truculence about toeing the American line on Iran; the Kremlin's crackdown on democracy activists and nongovernmental organizations; and Mr. Putin's decision to run for prime minister after leaving his post as president — all have increased the frustration within the American diplomatic community, both at the White House and the State Department, over U.S.-Russian relations.

Mr. McCain was reflecting that frustration in his speech, but was also going a step further, foreign policy experts say. Not only did he frame his most provocative Russia comments around the question of NATO enlargement and Europe, but he did it in a speech which was otherwise conciliatory.

"It shows you something of the way that the U.S. and Europe view Russia right now that Russia-baiting rhetoric is not seen any more by Europe as a combustible, trigger-happy America," said Stephen Sestanovich, the

George F. Kennan Senior Fellow for Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. "It's an example of putting down a marker about how he feels about Europe and how he plans to keep Russia in the spotlight."

Mr. Sestanovich, who advises the Hillary Clinton campaign, along with other foreign policy experts, said it is unlikely that Mr. McCain will try to follow through on his threat to kick Russia out of the Group of Eight if he is elected president. Europe probably would not go for that, and the United States needs Russia on too many separate issues, including attempts to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions, to risk alienating them over something like membership in the G-8.

And besides, presidential candidates are notorious for trying to sound tough on international issues on the campaign trail and then making nice when they are elected and have to engage in the horse-trading aspects of diplomacy. Mr. Bush himself made tough sounds about Russia before he was elected president and looked into Mr. Putin's soul.

But don't expect a return to the euphoria of the 1990s after the cold war ended. Mr. McCain is not the only one who is mad at Russia these days. Mr. Putin angered many American and European policymakers recently when he threatened to re-target nuclear missiles toward Ukraine if it joins NATO. Mr. Putin's comments — which he made while standing next to Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko — so infuriated Senator Richard G. Lugar, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that Mr. Lugar questioned whether NATO was right to invite Mr. Putin to the NATO summit next month in Bucharest, when membership for Ukraine and Georgia will be considered.

"To invite President Putin into this situation, I suspect, is to give him a meeting in which he intimidates them further," Mr. Lugar said at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting on NATO. "In this context this seems to be very dubious."

#11

Renouncing anti-Israel remarks, Russian Muslims reach out to Jews

By Grant Slater

JTA, March 31, 2008

Russia's chief rabbi and the chairman of the country's main Islamic council are patching up a relationship severed two weeks ago after an Islamic community leader called Zionism a cancer and Israel a fascist state.

Ravil Gaynutdin, the chairman of Russia's Council of Muftis, reached out to Rabbi Berel Lazar during Purim celebrations and asked for a meeting as the Russian media began to report that Lazar's Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities was cutting ties with the council.

In a joint statement released on the council's Web site, the two leaders said they were "ready to continue maintaining a respectful and trusting relationship."

The statement made no mention of Nafigullah Ashirov, a co-chairman of the Islamic council, whose comments this month drove a wedge between the two groups.

"Zionism is a cancerous tumor because Zionism is fascism," Ashirov, the council's director of spiritual administration in the Asian part of Russia, said at a March 4 news conference when asked how he felt about Israel.

After Ashirov made similar comments at a rally last year, Jewish leaders decried the remarks and called on the Council of Muftis to repudiate them. The council responded swiftly, saying Ashirov's beliefs did not represent its view.

This time, however, the council remained silent after the comments were widely reported and the Jewish federation again asked the council to denounce the statements.

"We took this silence as a sign of agreement with Ashirov's opinion," the federation's spokesman, Boruch Gorin, told JTA.

Both Lazar and Gaynutdin are members of Russia's Public Chamber, a consulting body to the Russian Legislature comprised of prominent figures in Russian society. The federation and council participate in the Russian government's interreligious councils and engage in interfaith dialogues.

On March 20, the federation announced that it would not participate with the Council of Muftis in these forums. The same day, Gaynutdin reached out to Lazar for the meeting, which Lazar scheduled for March 27, Gorin said.

But the conflict continued to simmer, attracting the attention of the Russian media, government and religious groups.

It was the first such split between two groups from different religions in Russia's post-Soviet history, Gorin said.

Alexander Ignatenko, a member of the Public Chamber and the president of the Institute of Religion and Politics, said Nashirov's words were part of an attempt to radicalize Russia's Islamic population.

"With all his comments, Ashirov was not expressing the opinion of Russian Muslims but rather broadcasting over Russian media slogans and statements that were formed outside Russia," Ignatenko told the Russian-language Jewish News Agency.

Most of Russia's Muslims are more liberal and less susceptible to anti-Western or anti-Israeli rhetoric than those in the Arab world, Gorin said, adding that Ashirov may well represent the minority as "the loud-mouth voice of the Arabic community of Russia."

Evgeny Satanovsky, the president of the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies in Moscow and a vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress, said Ashirov embodied the worst aspects of a creeping influence from more strident anti-Zionist regimes in Iran, Syria and the Palestinian territories.

The disparity in ideology between Russian Islamic leaders and their counterparts abroad presents a problem.

"The major danger is the civil war inside the Muslim community," Satanovsky said.

The Council of Muftis reacted with surprise to the intensity of the furor surrounding the federation's announcement that it was suspending ties with the council.

In a statement on its Web site about the "alleged controversy" in the Russian mass media, the council said it had never received an official request from the federation to denounce Ashirov's statements.

"The situation has all been played out for the sake of the press," the statement said.

Gorin said the council promised the federation "that in the very near future they would find how to stop provocative announcements from getting out."

Leading up to the Muslim-Jewish meeting, other Islamic umbrella organizations rushed to condemn Ashirov's statements.

Rastam Valeyev, an envoy for the Russian Central Muslim Spiritual Administration, told the Interfax news service that Ashirov's comments had "endangered interreligious peace in the country."

One day after the split, the Public Chamber's committee on religion adopted a statement calling on both sides to re-engage in dialogue.

Rabbi Zinovy Kogan, the chairman of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations, took a measured approach to Ashirov's remarks.

"Before deciding to freeze the relations, meetings should be held to discuss the disputable aspects," Kogan said.

With the apparent denouement of the conflict last week, several leaders in the Jewish community said the events signaled a change in tone among their organizations in Russia as they defend against anti-Semitism and attacks on Israel.

Alexander Axelrod, the Anti-Defamation League's representative in Moscow, said before last week's reconciliation that no matter what steps are taken, an emboldened Jewish stance has been aired over the past two weeks.

Satanovsky of the Russian Jewish Congress noted that Russian Jews today are free to speak out against anti-Semitic or anti-Israel rhetoric without fear.

"In the year 2008, the Jewish community is strong enough, independent enough and I think have all the possibilities to tell these guys what we really think about them," he said.

#12

Mufti Ashirov insists on his condemnation of Zionism, respect for Judaism Interfax, April 3, 2008

Moscow - Russian Council of Muftis Co-Chairman Nafigullah Ashirov is not going to backtrack from his negative comments on Zionism, which, in his view, should not be associated with Judaism or the Jewish people in general.

"It is absolutely wrong to accuse me of hatred toward the Jewish people or Judaism, and this is a provocation on the part of the FJCR [the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia] and those forces that paint white in black. I really love the Jewish people, but my attitude toward the Israeli state's aggressive policy is extremely negative," Ashirov told Interfax-Religion on Thursday.

"There have been a lot of devoted Muslims among Jews, especially in the past years. There were Jews among the Prophet Muhammad's followers; the Prophet Jesus Christ, whom we love and respect, was also a Jew, and the Prophet Moses, whom we also love, was a Jew as well," Ashirov said.

The Russian Inter-Religious Council on Wednesday condemned Mufti Ashirov's recent remarks in which he compared Zionism to Fascism. Before that, his remarks had been harshly criticized by the FJCR, the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations, and the Council of Mufti itself, whose chairman, Ravil Gainutdin, forwarded a letter of regret to Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar.

Meanwhile, Ashirov suggested that Gainutdin "was misled."

"I am sure he will never criticize people who condemn the crimes of Zionism," Ashirov said.

Ashirov insisted that he has not and will not backtrack from his position on Zionism. "The crimes of the Zionist regime are similar to Fascism, but they should not be equated with the entire Jewish people, not to mention Judaism," he said.

#13

Tracking Hate Crimes a Tricky Business

By Matt Siegel

Moscow Times, March 27, 2008

After the 17th body was discovered in mid-February, alarm bells began to sound.

Hate-crime monitors announced a significant spike in xenophobic attacks nationwide, warning that if the trend continued through the end of the year there would be a 200 percent rise in the number of violent racist crimes compared with 2007.

The trend does not appear to be fading. As of Wednesday, 38 people had been murdered in racially motivated attacks, according to the Sova Center, one of the country's two main NGOs tracking hate crimes.

But exactly what conclusions can be drawn from these figures is difficult to gauge given the inexact science of tracking such crimes.

Sova and the other leading NGO in the field, the EU-funded Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, are responsible for nearly all working information on hate crimes in Russia. But their figures tend to leap wildly from year to year and from region to region. And while they describe their data as invaluable, they concede that they face considerable barriers in compiling an accurate portrait of the problem.

"I don't honestly think that anyone has exact statistics," said Alexander Brod, a Public Chamber member and head of the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights.

While there is no single methodological standard used worldwide to collect data on hate crimes, many governments track figures culled from local police and NGOs. In Russia's vast regions, many of which lack civic institutions and police trained in identifying racist attacks, experts say this has proven a nearly impossible task.

In many remote regions, for example, Sova relies on a primitive combination of word of mouth and Internet monitoring to gather information, Sova head Alexander Verkhovsky said. Often the organizations can merely scan neo-Nazi chat rooms, follow local media reports and wait for the next blip to appear on the radar.

In areas lacking Internet access, collecting any data at all can be nearly impossible, Verkhovsky said. "In some cases, like Volgograd, we are sure there are more incidents than we know of because there is a very active nationalist movement there," he said. "But we have practically no information from the region."

Sova, which is funded by the Soros Foundation and National Endowment for Democracy, works with local NGOs where they are available. But such organizations are sparse, and where they do exist, they rarely coordinate with law enforcement authorities, said Paul Legendre, acting head of the Fighting Discrimination Program with the New York-based NGO Human Rights First.

"I think we're still a long way away from that in a country like Russia, where there's not the type of cooperation between government authorities and NGOs that we'd like to see," Legendre said.

Human Rights First publishes an annual Hate Crimes Report Card, ranking all 56 OSCE member states on their efforts in tracking and combating racist crimes. Russia, which maintains no official data differentiating hate crimes from other "extremist" crimes, received one of the lowest grades in the 2007 report, ranking at the bottom alongside Belarus and Turkmenistan.

There were 650 racist attacks in Russia last year, up from 564 from 2006, according to Sova figures.

There were notable spikes in such attacks in various regions, including Voronezh and St. Petersburg, both of which saw a 50 percent jump in the number of hate crimes last year compared with 2006, according to Sova.

Establishing trends in other regions, however, is not so clear-cut, Verkhovsky said. In the Irkutsk region, for example, Sova recorded 54 hate crimes last year, up from only eight hate crimes in 2006. The dramatic increase there, he said, was not due to increased ultranationalist activity but rather two large-scale attacks.

Sova has not recorded any hate crimes there this year, Verkhovsky said.

In the Belgorod region, there were four hate crimes recorded in 2005, 18 in 2006 and only one last year, according to Sova.

Gloomy forecasts and jagged trends aside, experts were quick to point out that Russia is hardly alone in failing to thoroughly track the issue.

The Human Rights First report chastised EU members Italy, Estonia and Spain for failing to provide sufficient information on hate crimes.

Jo-Anne Bishop, head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Program at the OSCE, which monitors hate crimes and offers training and recommendations to member governments, noted that fewer than 10 member countries provide what they consider adequate data.

This "tremendous data deficit" across OSCE member states is due in part to a lack of a unifying methodology, Bishop said. "It's very difficult to impose or suggest or recommend a uniform model, because for every country it's different," she said.

Bishop and others said, however, that Russia had shown a greater willingness to tackle the issue of hate crimes.

In 2006, the government sent two experts to an OSCE hate-crimes training seminar in Paris. In December, the Moscow Interior Ministry University invited a group of OSCE trainers to Moscow to conduct a seminar for senior law enforcement officials on recognizing and tracking such crimes. Russia has also expressed interest in joining the OSCE's Regional Network on Hate Crime Prevention and Investigation, Bishop said.

President-elect Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday told Public Chamber members that law enforcement authorities and judges should take a "harsh position" and not "hide their heads in the sand" when it comes to hate crimes, Itar-Tass reported.

While questions remain about the accuracy of the existing data for Russia, experts and government officials both say the number of hate crimes continues to rise dramatically.

Then First Deputy Interior Minister Alexander Chekalin told a security conference in January that the number of extremist crimes has risen steadily in recent years, from 130 in 2004 to 356 last year. A majority of these crimes were "ethnically or religiously motivated," Chekalin said, RIA-Novosti reported.

It was unclear whether Chekalin, who was relieved of his duties by executive order, the Kremlin announced Wednesday, was referring primarily to crimes against foreigners and dark-skinned people in Russia, the type of crimes most often recorded by Sova and the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights.

Chekalin did tell the conference that up to 15 percent of young people "hold nationalist ideas," though it was unclear exactly what criteria the Interior Ministry used to determine that figure.

The ministry referred all inquiries this month to the Prosecutor General's Office, which did not respond to a written request for comment.

Legendre of Human Rights First said the increase in such crimes could merely be a result of closer attention to the issue by authorities and NGOs alike.

"In any country, the more you start monitoring, the more you're going to find that the numbers go up simply because you're taking note of a problem you hadn't taken note of before," he said.

Still, some officials deny any spike in hate crimes. City Prosecutor Yury Syomin told government daily Rossiiskaya Gazeta in a March 19 interview that the number of "crimes motivated by religious and ethnic hatred" in Moscow is actually falling "year by year."

"I am sure there is no growing wave of extremism," Syomin said.

#14

Ukraine's Chief Picks Big Targets She Bucks Moscow, Moguls, Traders; Worry in the West By Marc Champion Wall Street Journal, April 2, 2008

KIEV, Ukraine – A poster on the Web site of Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko shows her in a long black coat, carrying a Samurai sword. "Get out of the darkness," orders a scrawled caption.

Ms. Tymoshenko, who made a fortune in the gas trade with Russia in the mid-1990s, has been swinging her sword against Moscow, natural-gas traders and some of Ukraine's wealthiest businessmen.

"Every week we are dragging different parts of this economy out of the shadows, from corruption," she said in an interview. "You have to use strength."

Ms. Tymoshenko's motives in tackling the endemic corruption that cripples Ukraine have become a central question for this strategic, Texas-size country sandwiched between Russia and the European Union.

Ms. Tymoshenko's message is popular in Ukraine, where frustration is deep at the meager results of the dramatic pro-democracy protests of 2004, known as the Orange Revolution. Many supporters believe she alone has the will to rekindle the drive to build a Western-style democracy and economy in Ukraine.

In the few months since she returned to power in December, Ms. Tymoshenko went to the wall with Russia's gas monopoly OAO Gazprom in an effort to eliminate two middleman trading companies. She returned hundreds of millions of dollars to Ukrainians who lost savings to hyperinflation in the 1990s. And she revived Ukraine's moribund bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Some European countries worry that speeding Ukraine toward NATO will freeze relations with Moscow and could disrupt natural-gas deliveries, as happened in 2006. Pipelines through Ukraine deliver more than 80% of Russia's supply to the European Union.

Ms. Tymoshenko has focused much of her energy on trying to force two middlemen companies out of the lucrative gas trade between Russia and Ukraine. She has accused the companies of effectively bankrupting Ukraine's national energy company and of siphoning money to high officials in both countries. RosUkrEnerg officials have repeatedly denied those accusations.

Last week, however, a businessman widely thought to be close to Ms. Tymoshenko, Ihor Kolomoisky, said he was in talks to buy the Ukrainian half of the main middleman, RosUkrEnerg, which Moscow says must stay in business for now.

Her opponents say she just wants to see her own business supporters benefit. "She's trying to re-create [the gas company that made her rich in the 1990s], but she has to do it through someone else," says Konstantin Borodin, an energy consultant and formerly spokesman of the energy minister who was ousted when Ms. Tymoshenko took power.

Ms. Tymoshenko says Mr. Kolomoisky is an unscrupulous "raider" who uses corrupt courts to secure assets. She promised to fight his bid, as well as his recent seizure of control over Ukraine's biggest oil refinery.

Ms. Tymoshenko's daughter Yevgenia believes her mother is badly, and often deliberately misunderstood.

"There was this image a lot of people had of my mum as someone who was involved in shady deals and is just the same as everyone else," says Yevgenia, speaking in her house outside Kyiv. "I think that image is slowly being destroyed as people see more of her and her policies. But it's taking a long time."

Ms. Tymoshenko, 47 years old, started life modestly. She grew up with her single mother in Dnipropetrovsk, an industrial city in South East Ukraine. She took part-time jobs including stacking tractor tires while at university.

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Ukraine was ravaged by hyperinflation. The Soviet-era supply chains broke down. Anything was possible with the right connections, and Ms. Tymoshenko had a genius for making them. She started bartering Ukrainian goods for oil and then for natural gas from Russia.

She arrived at the office of then-Gazprom chief Rem Vyakhirev dressed in a miniskirt and jackboots in an effort to persuade him to let her handle gas trade with Ukrainian factories that had racked up billions of dollars in debt. "It was the fashion, I didn't wear them just for him," she laughs.

To make money, Ms. Tymoshenko's company, United Energy Systems of Ukraine, built complicated cashless supply chains of products from raw iron ore to finished steel pipes and military hardware. Each Ukrainian factory would pay for gas by supplying goods to the next factory in the chain, using products of a slightly higher value than the last. By the end of the chain, UESU walked away with enough goods to pay Gazprom, plus up to 50% extra as profit, according to Viktor Butok, a vice president of UESU who helped to design and run the system. In 1996, the turnover involved in UESU's business was around \$10 billion.

UESU was able to grow because Pavlo Lazarenko, the governor of Ms. Tymoshenko's home town of Dnipropetrovsk, became prime minister in 1996. He licensed Ms. Tymoshenko to deliver gas to most of the industry. Rival business clans became jealous. In 1997, Mr. Lazarenko was forced to resign under pressure from President Leonid Kuchma and UESU lost its market to a new state energy company Mr. Kuchma created.

Mr. Lazarenko is now in California, appealing a conviction for money laundering. According to the court papers describing the charges in that case, Ms. Tymoshenko's company paid over \$100 million in bribes into his personal accounts.

"Corruption existed then and it exists now," says Ms. Tymoshenko, asked about the payments. She took the Ukrainian equivalent of the Fifth Amendment when questioned for the Lazarenko case. "But some accept this and try to benefit from the situation. Others try to change it." Ms. Tymoshenko went into politics full time after her company's collapse, eventually creating a party in her own name.

By the time of the Orange Revolution in 2004, many Ukrainians saw Ms. Tymoshenko not as an oligarch, but as a popular crusader against corruption. She lasted just six months in the prime minister's job that time, however. "I tried to change everything in six months and that was a mistake," says Ms. Tymoshenko. "I was the only warrior in the field."

#15

Inadequate migration laws and policies contribute to xenophobia

Editorial

Kyiv Post, March 27, 2008

Since early 2008, Ukrainian authorities have reported 29 incidents of violence against foreigners, which in the opinion of international experts, can be interpreted as racial intolerance or xenophobia.

However, monitoring by human rights organizations reveal more cases.

In 2007, 70 persons became victims of violence on racial, ethnic and religious grounds (these figures apply not only to foreigners, but also national minorities), as reported by the Congress of National Communities of Ukraine.

As a result of intolerance on ethnic grounds, more than 100 incidents of hostility and xenophobia were recorded in Ukraine in 2006 and 2007, which caused the death of 20 persons of other ethnicities, according to Ukraine's Ombudsman Representative Vasyl Tereshchuk.

The famous statement, "if you don't deal with politics, politics will deal with you," describes the current situation in Ukrainian society regarding the spread of intolerance and xenophobia.

Critics of the above thesis point out the level of racial intolerance in Ukraine is not much higher than in European countries experiencing even more complicated situations linked to interethnic conflicts caused by growing migration.

For European society, this issue is getting more acute due to migration policy. More than 40 percent of all immigrants to EU states are not ethnically European, and their numbers will increase. Needless to say, socially integrating migrants in EU states is difficult, though European governments try to prevent hate speech in the media and have programs aimed at fostering mutual understanding and tolerance.

Ukraine's situation is different. It lacks the respective experience with migration policy and places a low priority on it. Current integration policy does not provide answers to questions emerging today.

The main directions of government migration policy mostly concern actions to counteract illegal migration, and to prevent Ukraine from becoming a buffer zone for illegal migrants seeking a better life in EU countries.

While the need to combat illegal migration is justified, society's attitude towards migrants in Ukraine is another matter.

According to the 2001 National Census, in Ukraine, there were 168,000 people of other ethnicities and about 83,000 stateless people. Ethnic diasporas are gradually forming in our country, which was atypical for the Soviet Union. Experts emphasize that the number of Chinese and Azerbaijani ethnic communities are increasing in Kyiv, as well as a Vietnamese enclave in Kharkiv.

Meanwhile, the number of legally registered labor migrants in Ukraine is on average 10,000 people per year.

At present, approximately 40,000 students from 129 countries study in Ukraine and live mostly in large cities, such as Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa.

It is very difficult to identify the exact number of foreigners in our country, though some experts estimate it at one million people annually.

Other indicative data appeared in 2006. In a report presented at the 39th session of the Commission on Population and Development, then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan noted Ukraine ranks fourth in the number of international migrants.

Yet, we know about these new migrant communities mostly because of criminal incidents like illegal migration and drug and human trafficking.

Today there is no answer for these problems. For example, a draft of the government's ethnic policy forwarded to the Cabinet of Ministers on March 14 and presented for public discussion does not mention new migrant communities or a policy for them, and neither does the draft of the 2008 Government Action Program, which awaits parliamentary approval.

The presidential decree, "On Holding a CrossCultural Dialogue in Ukraine in 2008," did not address the problem either. Hence, the government views its actions on new migrant communities mostly in the context of migration policy, which lacks clear formulation, consistency and coordination.

One of the risks of the lack of attention to migration is the growth of intolerant youth movements, a trend reported by reputable international institutions. The Third Report on Ukraine by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance said "foreign students have become the target of racist violence by members of skinhead groups either on or off campus."

On March 21, Ambassadors from EU member states met with the Ukrainian Justice Minister Mykola Onishchuk and Minister of Internal Affairs Yuriy Lutsenko and voiced their concern over the increase in violence against foreigners and growing xenophobia.

They were also disturbed by the response to such incidents by Ukraine's lawenforcement agencies, who merely reported them as "hooliganism."

On March 14, similar issues were raised at the signing of the protocol to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the United States on LawEnforcement Technical Assistance.

US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor, Jr. noted the work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine on investigating crimes against foreigners was ineffective.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine recognized the discrimination of foreign students in higher institutions and called for a tolerant attitude from students towards each other.

On Nov. 13, 2007, the Ministry established an ambassador with special instructions on combating racism, xenophobia, discrimination and their manifestations, whose mission is "to take respective action on combating anti-Semitism, preventing the instigation of interethnic and interreligious conflicts in Ukraine and coordinating activities with other ministries and departments in this context."

As long ago as May 2007, the Ministry of Internal Affairs developed and approved an action program through 2009 for counteracting racism.

A special branch to elaborate and implement a strategy against crimes on ethnic grounds has been set up under the Criminal Investigation Department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Lutsenko said he will initiate the creation of an Interdepartmental Task Force on Combating Xenophobia and Racism.

Other official rhetoric concerning the presence of racism and xenophobia in Ukraine varies. For instance, Justice Minister Mykola Onishchuk said in early February "presently, it is only possible to mention separate episodes, each of which is being thoroughly investigated by the government."

Right after the notorious murders of several foreigners at the beginning of the year, Lutsenko made public rather dangerous figures, emphasizing these incidents are not that uncommon.

"Over the last two months, in the capital alone, law enforcement agencies have revealed more than 500 members of the skinhead movement, of whom 30 have prior convictions," he said.

Yet on Feb. 28, Deputy Internal Affairs Minister Volodymyr Yevdokymov said "among thousands of crimes committed against guests from abroad, including murders (22 in 2007 and 5 in early 2008), racist or xenophobic incidents are almost absent, save the killing of a Congo citizen in Kyiv."

The reason for different interpretations is inadequate hate crime laws. Specifically, Article 161 of Ukraine's criminal code calls for criminal responsibility for deliberate actions, whose aim is inciting ethnic, racial or

religious animosity, as well as hatred aimed at humiliating the national honor and dignity of a person, or offending citizens' feelings based on their religious views. This article has seldom been enforced by the courts as it requires proof of deliberate action on the part of the perpetrator.

Furthermore, Article 161 still only refers to citizens, not stateless persons and foreigners. And this is just one of numerous examples that illustrate the consequences of inattention to counteracting xenophobia and racism.

The respective issues are apparently too multifaceted. They include the development of economic, social and educational policies, social activities, as well as the formulation and application of a policy to integrate migrants.

These actions can be comprehensive and interdependent because if no attention is paid to combating xenophobia today, tomorrow this problem might be yet another factor poisoning Ukrainian society.

Yulia Tyshchenko is an analyst at the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research, financed by the National Endowment for Democracy since 1995.

#16

Belarus: Independent Media Targeted By Authorities

By Michael Scollon

RFE/RL, March 28, 2008

The Belarusian authorities this morning resumed their crackdown, a day after dozens of journalists were detained for questioning by the KGB. Many of them also had their private apartments searched.

In a telephone interview with RFE/RL, independent journalist Alena Stsyapanava described the KGB's search of her home in Vitsebsk.

"Around 9 a.m. someone rang to my apartment -- not from the house intercom but the doorbell," Stsyapanava said. "My husband opened the door. I heard that he was being asked for the passports of residents because, they said, it was a check of whether the residents have the right to live there. Only after that did they show us a search warrant."

Targeted were media outlets or journalists with ties to the outside world, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Investigators also zeroed in on employees of Radio Racja and Belsat, both primarily Polish-funded, and the EU-funded European Radio for Belarus -- which have all been denied government accreditation.

U.S. Criticism

In a statement issued on March 27, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack condemned the raids, saying, "some 30 independent journalists in 12 cities were detained without legitimate cause."

He said this week's incidents show that a "brutal, authoritarian dictatorship that blatantly ignores human rights and fundamental freedoms" is in power in Belarus.

Polish President Lech Kaczynski expressed the "deepest possible anxiety" over the developments, and said the situation in Belarus is taking a turn for the worse.

Homel-based independent journalist Anatol Hatouchyts spoke to RFE/RL after his home was searched on March 27.

"I have been a professional journalist for more than 30 years. Naturally, I have a computer, and my wife has a computer. I have tape recorders, diskettes. All this was confiscated. They confiscated 31 items in total. In fact, all this was done in order to paralyze the work of journalists who work for nonstate media," Hatouchyts said.

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maryya Vanshyna said on March 27 the searches were being conducted to uncover journalists working illegally in Belarus. "The illegal character of these individuals' activities in Belarus has never been hidden by their foreign owners," she said.

Cartoons Controversy

Belarusian Deputy Prosecutor-General Alyaksey Stuk, however, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service the same day that investigators were looking for signs the targeted journalists had cooperated with the creators of animated cartoons deemed insulting to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

"The search was linked to me. The search warrant stated that I have to be a witness in a criminal case opened in 2005 against citizens by the name of Marozau, Minich, and Abozau," Stsyapanava said. "While staying abroad, they allegedly disseminated -- via the television company Belsat -- cartoons that defame the president of the republic of Belarus."

Andrey Abozau, Pavel Marozau, and Aleh Minich fled Belarus in 2007 to avoid arrest in connection with the cartoons, which were originally posted on their website, "Third Path," and continue to circulate on the Internet.

Defaming the Belarusian president is punishable by up to four years in prison.

The Polish-funded television station Belsat, which has broadcast the cartoons, said 20 of its Belarusian employees were detained. The Belarusian Journalists Association recorded 16 journalists who were either detained or whose apartments were searched.

A human rights activist was also reportedly detained during a search of a journalist's apartment in Visebsk for swearing. Pavel Levinau had arrived on the scene to ensure that the search was being conducted in accordance with the law.

The Belarusian Journalists Association has petitioned the Prosecutor-General's Office to stop the searches, and has objected to the confiscation of audio and video equipment and printed material.

Embassy Recall

The crackdown came on a day that 17 U.S. diplomats left Belarus -- a concession to Minsk's recent demand that the U.S. Embassy's staff be halved. U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Karen Stewart was recalled two weeks ago, and some embassy services in Minsk have been curtailed or suspended.

The staff reductions followed accusations that the embassy had recruited a dozen Belarusians to pass information for use against Belarus to the FBI -- allegations the United States has denied.

U.S.-Belarusian relations were further strained when truncheon-wielding Belarusian police violently broke up a street rally on March 25 and detained some 80 demonstrators. Several hundred opposition activists had gathered in a Minsk square to mark the 90th anniversary of the creation of the Belarusian People's Republic, which was subsequently crushed by Bolshevik forces.

The newly appointed U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, David Kramer, told RFE/RL earlier this week that breaking up the rally was "thuggish behavior on the part of the security forces."

"A reminder, I think, of the total lack of respect that the authorities have demonstrated in the past for citizens' rights to assemble and speak freely. It is very unfortunate that a number of people not only were arrested, but many beaten up by the authorities. Totally uncalled for," Kramer said.

Kramer at the time touted a united U.S.-EU front in calling for the Belarusian authorities to ease restrictions on citizens and civil society.

"Belarus is in the heart of Europe, and it remains the last dictatorship in Europe, and it is a country where, together, the United States and the European Union feel we need to both apply pressure on the government so that it demonstrates greater respect for human rights for its own citizens, but also where we reach out to civil society and the democratic opposition and NGOs in Belarus to show that we support what they are trying to achieve in their country," Kramer said.

The EU has echoed the U.S. condemnation of the recent events in Belarus, calling on Belarus to end the crackdown if it wants to improve relations with the bloc.

Since the beginning of the year, President Lukashenka has indicated that he wants to improve relations with the EU. He has released most of the country's political prisoners -- a key EU demand -- and given the European Commission the go-ahead to open up a branch in Minsk.

However, one former Belarusian political prisoner, Syarhey Skrabets, believes Brussels could do more:

"I think all this [political persecution] takes place only because the European Union maintains permanent contacts with the current authorities. Had they taken the position that was taken by the United States, all this would not have happened."

#17

Belarus Nabs Lawyer to the Oligarchs in Cloak-and-Dagger Affair

By Marc Perelman

Forward, April 3, 2008

The Cold War may be over, but its cloak-and-dagger intrigues are alive and kicking in the former Soviet Union.

On March 12, Emanuel Zeltser, a self-styled expert on white-collar crime who immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and has been a counsel to a series of controversial Soviet-born moguls, was nabbed upon his arrival in Minsk by Belarus's state security agency. He has been held since then, charged with using forged documents.

Zeltser's supporters claim he is the victim of the diplomatic showdown between the Bush administration and the regime of strongman Aleksander Lukashenko, which began when American sanctions were slapped against a leading Belarus energy company and resulted in the downsizing of the U.S. Embassy in Minsk amid accusations that it was running a spy ring. But as in every spy thriller, there is an even more complicated backstory, alleged in this case by the imprisoned lawyer's brother, Mark: that Zeltser is entangled in a ruthless power struggle to gain control over the considerable assets of Arkady "Badri" Patarkatsishvili, a Georgian mogul who abruptly died earlier last February in London. If this weren't enough, the man alleged by Mark Zeltser to be orchestrating the imprisonment is none other than Boris Berezovsky — a close friend of Patarkatsishvili's and one of the most well-known Russian oligarchs.

"This is a big money thing and a political affair. I am very afraid for my brother," Mark Zeltser told the Forward.

Mark Zeltser claims that his brother, who is 54, has been tortured, deprived of vital medicines and coerced to admit false crimes. He expressed disappointment that his brother's case was handled not at senior levels at the State Department but merely by the office in charge of citizens abroad. He also surmised that there could be a cynical reason for this seeming offhandedness: If his brother were to die, Washington could then use the incident as a wedge against Lukashenko.

According to Steve Royster, a State Department official, Emanuel Zeltser has access to a lawyer and is in "reasonable health," but he would not comment beyond this fact except to say that the United States was seeking regular access to the detainee. (American officials did not receive permission to meet Zeltser in jail until March 27.) The Belarusian government will not comment on the case.

The backstory's narrative seems to have begun on February 12, when Patarkatsishvili — who was, at the time of his death, one of Emanuel Zeltser's clients — died, apparently of a heart attack, in London. Patarkatsishvili made a fortune in Russia during the controversial privatization of state industries in the 1990s in partnership with Berezovsky, and both men had taken refuge in London after falling out with their respective governments — Patarkatsishvili with Georgia and Berezovsky, more famously, with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, who undertook a series of legal actions to strip him of his assets and sue him for embezzlement, prompting the mogul to seek and obtain asylum in Britain.

When his old ally Patarkatsishvili died, the mogul's assets became the subject of a dispute pitting his widow backed by Berezovsky, against his stepcousin, Joseph Kay, who is represented by Zeltser.

Berezovsky could not be reached for comment, but he admitted the existence of the dispute over the inheritance in a March 22 interview on Georgian TV. In it, he said Kay and Zeltser had tried to convince Patarkatsishvili's family and authorities in Georgia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Israel and Belarus that Kay was the executioner of Patarkatsishvili's will by presenting false documents. In response, a lawyer representing Patarkatsishvili's widow sent a letter to the governments of those countries to alert them about the alleged fraud, Berezovsky was quoted as saying. According to Russian reports, the counsel, Michelle Duncan, also works for Berezovsky. She could not be reached for comment.

Four days after the Berezovsky interview, Kay countered in the Russian press that the documents designating him as executioner were not forgeries and that Zeltser was working to have them authenticated in court when he was arrested. And he accused Berezovsky of plotting Zeltser's arrest by luring him to Belarus.

Mark Zeltser goes even further, claiming that Berezovsky, who lost most of his fortune in recent years as a result of Putin's crackdown, had decided to physically eliminate his former business partner and is now working to neutralize his brother because he could deny him access to the money.

"When Berezovsky will sue with Patarkatsishvili's widow to get control of the assets, the lawyer handling the case and in possession of the documents will conveniently be in jail or dead in Minsk," he said.

Royster told the Forward that Zeltser appeared in "reasonable" health during his meeting with the American consular officer.

Zeltser's family claims that his life is in danger because he does not have access to the medications he takes for diabetes and gout, a claim confirmed to the Forward by Zeltser's Brooklyn-based physician, Dov Perkman.

"I want my brother back. I don't care how," Mark Zeltser said. "If Berezovsky needs to have his money, so be it."

#18

Dark dance: What is going on in Belarus? And in its ruler's head?

Editorial

The Economist, April 5-11, 2008

America calls it the "last dictatorship in Europe". It has political prisoners, police crackdowns, state-run media and a security service called the KGB. So Belarus's image could do with polishing. Its irascible president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, seems to accept this: Tim Bell, one of Britain's top public-relations men, was recently seen in Minsk, where he was in talks about a consultancy contract. As a Tory spin-doctor, he helped turn Margaret Thatcher into an election-winner. As Lord Bell he represents rich eastern Europeans such as Boris Berezovsky, an émigré Russian oligarch.

Mr Lukashenka's opponents have highlighted the irony that Lord Bell's visit was followed by a blitz on the opposition. Over 20 journalists from Belarus's independent media (chiefly foreign-based radio stations and small-circulation papers) were detained. The ostensible reason was an investigation into insulting cartoons of Mr Lukashenka on the internet. Defaming the president is a criminal offence.

On March 25th the police violently broke up an opposition rally to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Belarus's short-lived statehood after the first world war. Around 80 people were arrested. Opposition activists were harassed as well: in Vitebsk, Yelena Borshchevskaya, a schoolteacher, was marched from her school by KGB officials and taken home, where they undertook a six-hour search in which they confiscated computer equipment, storage materials and a photocopier, as well as an identity card belonging to Olga Karach, a local politician.

Shortly before the latest crackdown, Mr Lukashenka had ordered the American embassy in Minsk to cut its staff by half. On March 31st Belarus announced that it was reducing the size of its embassy in Washington and would expect America to make further cuts too.

Yet only a few weeks ago Mr Lukashenka had seemed to be going in the opposite direction, putting out feelers to the West, allowing the European Union to open an office in Minsk and releasing all but one of his political prisoners. That reflected official nerves about an economic squeeze by the Russians, who are driving a hard bargain on gas. Russia has little sympathy for Mr Lukashenka's swaggering and bombastic ways.

American sanctions on Belarus's main petrochemical company may have provoked the sharp response against their embassy, but they do not explain the wider crackdown. Some say there is a feud in Mr Lukashenka's circle, between those who want to keep control and those who think their only hope is rapprochement with the West. Or it may reflect the Belarusian leader's capricious thought processes. Lord Bell is used to difficult clients, but Mr Lukashenka may prove a tough challenge even for him.

#19

Moldova's Parliament approves new government

AP, March 31, 2008

CHISINAU, Moldova: Moldova's Communist-dominated parliament on Monday approved a new Cabinet that seeks to improve relations with the EU.

The new government will be led by Zinaida Greceanii, the country's first female prime minister. The 101-seat Parliament approved the new government with 56 votes. Greceanii will have five other female ministers.

The new government is seeking closer links with the EU, to consolidate democracy and a solution to the Trans-Dniester crisis, a separatist region in eastern Moldova. Trans-Dniester broke away in 1991 amid fears that Moldova wanted to reunite with Romania, of which it was part until 1940.

"We will concentrate our immediate efforts on three main directions: media freedom, an active dialogue with civil society and the independence of justice," Greceanii said, referring to steps for consolidating democracy.

The new Cabinet will also seek to keep Moldova's neutrality and to ensure energy security.

Only six out of the 21 members of the government are new names. The others, including Greceanii, were members of former Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev's government. New ministers were appointed for education, finance, health, interior, building works, and IT development.

Greceanii was a former finance minister from 2002 to 2005, when she was appointed deputy prime minister, a post she has held since.

In 2006, the economist negotiated the price of natural gas with the Russian state gas monopoly OAO Gazprom. Under the five-year deal, Moldova, one of Europe's poorest nations, will gradually pay more for natural gas until 2011, when it will pay the European average gas price.

The average monthly salary in Moldova is 2,200 lei (US\$220, €143).

The government will lead Moldova until the next elections, scheduled for 2009.

Tarlev resigned in March, in a leadership shake-up that he said would benefit the country.

#20

Reform and Rebuilding: US diplomat says Sargsyan has opportunity to “change the path”

By John Hughes

ArmeniaNow, March 28, 2008

Whether there is immediate implementation of democratic policies and a tendency away from repressive treatment of citizenry during the first days of President Serzh Sargsyan’s administration will determine if Armenia’s strained relationship with the United States is improved or suffers further damage in the fallout of February 19-March 1.

“The president is obviously facing a huge challenge to convince those who may be frustrated by some of the things that have happened, that things are going to be different,” US Charges de Affaires Joseph Pennington told ArmeniaNow in an interview at the US Embassy here Wednesday. “It is a challenge for him but it is also a huge opportunity. We have heard things from Prime Minister Sargsyan that he intends to change the path that Armenia is on and get back to a more democratic path . . .

“If he hits the ground running and starts doing some things that most Armenians agree would need to be reformed (mentioning media freedom, election reform, credible prosecutions, investigations). . . I think people will rally.”

While showing stately generosity toward the president-elect and hope for Armenia’s success under Sargsyan, Pennington was steadfast in voicing concerns that his country has held over Armenia’s behavior in this season of election and post-election. Pennington reiterated America’s misgivings about the fairness of the campaign season, the conduct of Election Day (the Charges de Affaires said that even he witnessed questionable procedure during the re-count of votes following the election), the post-election divisiveness, the severity of the State of Emergency and the subsequent “series of arrests”.

The US’s top diplomat in Armenia agreed with a characterization that Armenia is now “borderline” in terms of its eligibility for the US’ biggest ever allotment of aid to the country, the Millennium Challenge Account.

About \$235 million is at stake – nearly 10 times as much as is currently under debate for Congressional aid to Armenia next year – pending Armenia’s performance on issues mostly pertaining to democratic development and human rights.

But even as the Charges de Affaires spoke from his US compound Wednesday, police under the direction of outgoing president and Sargsyan advocate Robert Kocharyan were detaining peaceful demonstrators whose only apparent crime was to stand on Yerevan’s Northern Avenue in an act of silent defiance against the system that has led this tiny republic to its lowest moment of respect for human rights in its 17 year history of independence.

The United States, said Pennington (whose position is a proxy pending appointment of a new ambassador), considers future support from the United States to be “in jeopardy”, particularly as it concerns Millennium Challenge. Chief among the qualifications for disbursement of the funds is whether Armenia meets criteria based on improving inclusion of common citizenry into the democratic process. Areas such as human rights and including media freedoms not defined according to arbitrary government equations of responsibility to state order are among categories in which Armenia currently is outside acceptability.

The Charges de Affaires pointed out that, even prior to the presidential election of February 19 or the fatal and destructive clashes between authorities and protestors on March 1, “frankly there already were concerns” in the US whether Armenia would qualify for release of the Millennium Challenge funds.

The concern grew to alarm and was voiced in a March 11 letter to President Kocharyan by Millennium Challenge ambassador John Danilovich who formally notified the Armenian president that his “official warning” puts Armenia at risk of losing the US special funding should the current trend of repressions continue.

The Armenian president (indirectly) replied by saying that even if the US withdrew its gift, he was confident Armenia could “no doubt” find funding elsewhere to implement the considered projects – primarily underwriting programs that would reduce poverty in Armenia’s undeveloped regions.

Though not specified, it is reasonable to believe that out-going President Kocharyan was staking his confidence on the substantial and strengthening base Armenia continues to enjoy in its diplomatic and economic relations with Russia, home of Armenia’s largest Diaspora, and of the Kremlin, whose long shadow still covers current Armenian leadership.

Pennington acknowledged Armenia’s long history of Russian relations that pre-dates independent Armenia, as a measure of the US’ place on Armenia’s extended family tree when it comes to buying allegiance.

Still: “In terms of democratization we had a very clear idea of where we would like to see Armenia go, and I think that was shared by most Armenians.”

As the Charges de Affaires points out, the US – primarily through its United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) – has invested, mostly no-strings-attached, \$1.8 billion to strengthen Armenia’s chances of building a level of democracy that so far is lacking in Armenia and other post-soviet countries, including Russia.

During those years of handouts from America meanwhile, the Russians were calling in its markers of debt relinquishment by assuming Armenian resources including railroad communication, natural gas and nuclear and thermal power and telecommunications – acquisitions that hold multiple times the value of all the free dollars let loose by the Americans.

Sargsyan, whose election remains unrecognized by official Washington D.C., has already appeared in Moscow this week where he was congratulated by Kremlin authorities for restoring stability in Armenia and where he was assured that Moscow-Yerevan relations will remain on sure footing during his and Dmitry Medvedev’s upcoming presidencies.

And, while Sargsyan has dismissed notions of a Robert Kocharyan Premiership in Armenia, speculation has spread that Armenia’s outgoing president has been tapped to head a Russian-Armenian business conglomerate comparable to the mega-monopoly Gazprom in Russia.

Pennington says that the natural inclination toward Russia does not negate better relations with America. Still:

Left to ponder why money can’t buy love in this unlikely ménage a trios of superpowers and no power are American taxpayers (including Diaspora) whose annual government gifts of about \$100 million may now be seen to have added up to a payoff of negative returns and indifference.

While underscoring Armenia’s need to “reverse the trend” of its present and recent variation on democracy, the American diplomat dismisses a suggestion that money from America has been spent in vain.

He mentions health care improvement and banking reform among institutional areas in which the US has made a difference.

But making a difference is not the same as making a democracy and in that regard the US patience is again tried.

“We want to give the authorities the chance to reverse this situation,” Pennington said.

In the US, the administrative tendency of an incoming president is usually judged by his behavior in the first 100 days. Though this young democracy has yet to adopt such a tradition Pennington says that the period seems a "fair test of a trend" for the Sargsyan administration.

Whether trend or tradition, though, the ultimate scale of democracy will be tilted at home, the US statesman concludes.

"We don't have the answers to Armenia's problems. Ultimately these are the problems and challenges that Armenia faces in getting back to a democratic path. The international community and the United States can push and push and certainly use what influence we have in terms of assistance programs to try to encourage the government to go in the right direction, but ultimately we can't solve these problems. We can't step in and do it. Reform is going to have to be generated from within."

#21
4,000 Israelis coming home, but only 80 from Russia
By Lily Galili
Haaretz, April 4, 2008

Last November, the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption launched a campaign to encourage Israelis living abroad to return. Israeli expatriates are known by the derogatory term "yordim" - those who descend, in contrast to the "olim" who "ascend" to Israel - and a politically correct Hebrew term has yet to be found.

In preparation for the NIS 140 million campaign, the ministry defined its target audiences and conducted research to learn why Israelis leave, and what might bring them back. It selected popular Israeli Web sites as advertising venues, and decided to target people in North America, Europe and, above all, the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Five months later, the operation already can be considered a success. About 4,000 Israelis living abroad have registered to return, and 1,800 are already here. The Russians, however, are not coming back. The young, successful people who immigrated to Israel in the 1990s and chose to return to the former Soviet Union - the campaign's main target - largely ignored the whole thing. Most did not even click on the ministry's ads to see what was being offered. Only 80 or so of the tens of thousands of former immigrants living in the major cities of Russia and Ukraine heeded the call to return home.

Interest improved slightly - people at least bothered to visit the Web sites - when the Immigrant Absorption Ministry began advertising on Israeli Web sites in Russian, too.

The lesson in language preferences illustrates the clash between the Russian-speaking Israeli community and the culture at large - the state is good at courting, but bad at cultivating long-term relationships with those who respond to its entreaties.

It also became clear that the emotional appeal to Israelis to "return home" does not work on the Russian speakers. For some, Israel never became home, or Russia never stopped being home. Almost none consider it a contradiction to live in both worlds.

Roman Bronfman, a former Knesset member who is now a businessman, is familiar with some of these young Russian speakers from their time in Israel. He occasionally meets some during his business trips to Russia.

"I'm not at all surprised," Bronfman said. "In Israel they are considered inferior Israelis; in Russia they are superior Russians, because they have lived in the West. They return to [Russia] after acquiring foreign languages, a Western managerial approach.

"It's a reversal: In the 1990s they considered Israel to be a developed country; now I hear them say that Russia is an empire of culture and opportunity, and Israel is a provincial country between Africa and Asia. It's impossible to bring Russians back from Russia now," Bronfman said.

Dr. Zeev Khanin, a political scientist at Bar-Ilan University who immigrated to Israel in 1992, sees things slightly differently.

"Just as there is no clear legal definition of a yored, there is no sociological definition, either. Nevertheless, it's clear to me that the vast majority of Israelis living in Russia and Ukraine today never defined themselves as yordim until they heard about the propaganda to bring them back.

"[Most] see themselves as migrant workers or jobseekers. They visit Israel often and integrate into the local Jewish community. I believe they simply don't understand that the campaign to bring Israelis back is connected to them. From their perspective, they are still Israelis and big patriots," Khanin said.

Armed with new insights and assistance from an Israeli advertising agency that specializes in the Russian-speaking sector, the ministry is now launching the second phase of its campaign. Instead of the emotional appeal that has been so successful with Israelis living in Europe and North America, this stage focuses on economic incentives and renewing the connection with Israel, a senior ministry official explained. The appeal to Russian-speaking Israelis living abroad will concentrate on the business angle, with business and tax consultants set to travel to Russia and Ukraine to bring them home.