



**WASHINGTON, D.C. April 11, 2008**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

In Brief: U.S.-Russia Summit Aftermath

Dear Friend,

This week's update features a number of stories on the Bush-Putin meetings last week in Sochi, Russia. In addition to the news stories and analysis pieces we have included the joint statement issued by the two presidents. Their agreement on such an ambitious document came at their last official meeting together; it will be interesting to watch whether their successors use this document or not. There was clearly an attempt by both sides to lessen tensions – a good thing – as well as to highlight areas of agreement. However, significant differences remain on many of the major issues of concern. Overall, I would characterize the meeting as a step in the right direction. One meeting can't 'fix' the relationship, but it can certainly move it forward.

Since the Weekly Update was started, we have tried to highlight what is going on in the entire former Soviet Union. There are many stories each week about Russia and Ukraine, but also stories focusing on the other FSU countries. In this week's edition, we include stories on events that impact the Jewish populations throughout the region. From Belarus to Moldova to Uzbekistan and beyond, we hope that this week's update will give you a sense of the many types of issues NCSJ works on during any given week.

As always, I appreciate feedback on how to continually improve this publication. Please send your comments and/or suggestions to [ncsj@ncsj.org](mailto:ncsj@ncsj.org).

Sincerely,

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 11, 2008

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**#1**

**U.S.-Russia Strategic Framework Declaration**

**THE WHITE HOUSE, Office of the Press Secretary, April 6, 2008**

President Bush and President Putin issued on April 6, 2008, in Sochi a Declaration setting forth a framework for strategic cooperation between the United States and Russia. The Declaration outlines key elements of ongoing and new strategic initiatives between the two countries, including steps to promote security in the face of new and emerging threats; prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction; combat global terrorism; and advance economic cooperation. The Strategic Framework Declaration also acknowledges differences between the two countries, while agreeing to discuss these differences in a forthright manner without allowing these differences to prevent cooperation in other important areas.

The Declaration also commits both governments to respect the rule of law, international law, human rights, tolerance of diversity, political freedom, and a free market approach to economic policy and practices.

Among the areas of cooperation identified in the Strategic Framework Declaration are:

## Promoting security

- Missile Defense. The leaders expressed their interest in creating a system for responding to potential missile threats in which Russia and the United States and Europe will participate as equal partners.

Russia has made clear that it does not agree with the decision to establish sites in Poland and the Czech Republic and reiterated its proposed alternative. Yet, it appreciates the measures that the United States has proposed and declared that if agreed and implemented such measures will be important and useful in assuaging Russian concerns.

We agreed to intensify our dialogue after Sochi on issues concerning missile defense cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally.

- Post-START: The leaders agreed to develop a legally-binding arrangement following expiration of the START Treaty in December 2009. The Declaration notes the substantial reductions already carried out under the START Treaty and the Moscow Treaty, which remains in effect and was an additional important step in reducing numbers of deployed nuclear warheads.
- INF Treaty: In connection with the INF Treaty that eliminated the two countries' intermediate- and shorter-range missiles, the leaders agreed to engage in a high-level dialogue to analyze intermediate- and shorter-range missile threats and inventory options for dealing with them.
- Arms Sales: The U.S. and Russia will cooperate to prevent conventional arms sales that threaten international security and to deny conventional arms to terrorists.
- Defense Technology Cooperation: The U.S. and Russia agreed to finalize agreement on defense technology cooperation, including measures to counter IEDs.

## Preventing the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction

- Preventing Nuclear Proliferation: The Declaration affirms the governments' commitment to a broad range of activities to prevent nuclear proliferation, including the July 3, 2007 Declaration on joint actions to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime and promote the expansion of nuclear energy without the spread of sensitive fuel cycle technologies; the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, which supports development of the next generation of civil nuclear capability that will be safe and secure; the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, which brings together 67 participating countries in efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons; initiatives to create reliable access to nuclear fuel without proliferation risk; signature of and efforts to bring into force an Agreement on Cooperation in Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy; and completion by the end of 2008 of the agreed-to nuclear security upgrades under the two Presidents' Bratislava Nuclear Security Initiative.
- Iran: The United States and Russia remain committed to diplomatic efforts to achieve a negotiated solution guaranteeing that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes. They call on Iran to comply with the requirements of the IAEA Board of Governors and the UN Security Council, including its resolutions 1737, 1747, and 1803 that demand full and verifiable suspension of enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.
- North Korea: The two countries will continue to cooperate to implement UNSCR 1718 and the Six-Party agreements on North Korea's nuclear weapons and nuclear programs to achieve the ultimate goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

- Proliferation Security Initiative: The two countries reaffirm their commitment to this initiative, which seeks to prevent and deter trafficking in WMD, their delivery means and related materials; and agree to work together to prevent and disrupt proliferation-related finance.

#### Combating Global Terrorism

- The two leaders affirmed Russian-American partnership against terrorism. They agree to intensify their bilateral and multilateral efforts to fight against this common and global threat, both directly against terrorist groups and against their financial and criminal practices.

#### Strategic Economic Cooperation

- WTO: The United States and Russia are committed to achieving WTO accession for Russia as soon as possible and on commercially meaningful terms. With a major effort, especially between now and June, and with the cooperation of other parties, and by meeting the terms for WTO accession, Russia can qualify for membership and thus accession to the WTO can be achieved this year. In conjunction with the WTO negotiations, the Administration will work with Congress to enact legislation on Permanent Normal Trade Relations with Russia this year.
- Economic Dialogues: The U.S. and Russia agreed to create new government-to-government and business-to-business dialogues to enhance trade and investment relations, improve contacts between our business communities, and increase prosperity. It was agreed that our economic dialogues will aim to identify impediments to trade and investment, improve transparency of the business and investment environment, and strengthen rule of law.
- Bilateral Investment Treaty: The U.S. and Russia agreed to advance efforts on a new Bilateral Investment Treaty that will promote a stable and predictable framework for investment, to the benefit of the business communities in both countries.
- Energy Dialogue: The United States and Russia will work together to enhance energy security and diversify energy supplies through economically-viable routes, consistent with the G8 St. Petersburg principles, which include creation of open, transparent, efficient and competitive energy markets. They will also launch a new energy dialogue to develop lower-carbon emission energy sources, and collaborate on energy efficiency initiatives.
- Combating Climate Change: The United States and Russia will work together with all major emitting economies to advance key elements of the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in order to achieve a comprehensive post-2012 framework that includes greenhouse gas limitation or reduction commitments by all major economies consistent with their national circumstances and to address emissions in key sectors.

## #2

### **NATO-Russia Council Concludes 2008 Bucharest Summit**

**By David I. McKeeby**

**U.S. Department of State, April 4, 2008**

NATO leaders and Russian President Vladimir Putin have reaffirmed a number of areas of security cooperation, including airspace management, civil emergency planning, scientific cooperation and environmental security.

In a communiqué issued following the NATO-Russia Council's closed-door session April 4, Russia announced that it would open a new shipping corridor through its territory for nonmilitary goods and supplies in support of NATO's security and peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan. Specific details of the land corridor have not been announced.

"It's basically to facilitate the operations," explained a senior U.S. administration official April 4, "and is evidence of Russia stepping up and doing more to help the effort in Afghanistan, and that's a good thing."

The land corridor supports a U.N. Security Council resolution that calls on Afghanistan's neighboring nations to provide overflight clearances and transit clearances to assist the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

The NATO-Russia Council meeting concluded the April 2-4 Summit, held in Bucharest, Romania.

Despite political differences on Kosovo, council members expressed their commitment to "a stable, democratic, multiethnic, peaceful and secure future for the Western Balkans" and pledged that security in the former Serbian province remains a priority, according to the communiqué. NATO also provides a crucial 16,000-strong security force in Kosovo.

Both sides also agreed to continue discussions on a U.S. proposal for a limited missile defense system, a plan endorsed by the alliance on April 3 that remains a concern for Russia. The plan calls for the placement of 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and an advanced radar facility in the Czech Republic.

While redefining relations with Russia has been a unique priority for NATO since 1991, the 2002 NATO Summit in Rome saw the creation of the NATO-Russia Council, a new forum for member states to come together as equal partners to identify and pursue common security challenges, including counterterrorism, proliferation and narcotics trafficking, according to NATO.

"Today, our relations are truly multifaceted, influenced both by political realities and issues on which we differ, as well as by practical and very pragmatic common interests," said NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

Through the council, Moscow maintains liaison officers at NATO headquarters in Brussels, partners in the alliance's theatre missile defense efforts and actively participates in a regular series of joint military exercises. Since 2006, Russia's Black Sea Fleet has joined the 28-nation trans-Atlantic alliance in patrolling the Mediterranean under Operation Active Endeavour.

After the summit, President Bush traveled to Croatia to congratulate Croatians on their successful NATO membership bid in Bucharest. Bush will complete his travels in Europe with a visit to the Black Sea resort of Sochi for talks with Putin on missile defense cooperation and bilateral relations, and a meeting with Putin's incoming successor, Dmitry Medvedev.

### **#3**

#### **Putin, at NATO Meeting, Curbs Combative Rhetoric**

**By STEVEN ERLANGER**

**New York Times, April 5, 2008**

President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia complained Friday that NATO was not taking Russia's legitimate security concerns into account, but he also said that President Bush was listening to Moscow's criticisms of a planned missile defense system for Europe, which is to be based in the Czech Republic and Poland.

In a meeting with NATO leaders, Mr. Putin was combative and thoughtful, criticizing NATO's promise to eventually make Ukraine and Georgia members, officials who attended said.

"NATO cannot guarantee its security at the expense of other countries' security," Mr. Putin said, according to one official, and he complained that some NATO members, presumably those that were once under Soviet control, "went as far as total demonization of Russia, and can't get away from this even now."

Mr. Putin denied that Russia had imperial ambitions. He said it wanted cooperation with NATO on joint security problems — like Afghanistan and terrorism — and he agreed with Mr. Bush that the cold war was over, another Western official said.

It was Mr. Putin's first visit to a NATO summit meeting as the Russian president; it also was his last, because he is to hand over his job in May to Dmitri A. Medvedev. Mr. Putin gave one of his trademark news conferences, taking questions for nearly an hour in a measured and articulate way. In one of his odder comments about relations with NATO, he said, "Let's be friends, guys, and be frank and open."

Mr. Putin clearly did not intend to make waves here, a day before President Bush and he are to meet again in Sochi, a Russian resort on the Black Sea near Georgia, for what is likely to be their last bilateral discussion as presidents. That discussion, he said, will probably center on the proposed missile defense system, which Russia opposes as a threat to its security. "We evaluate the results of this meeting as positive," Mr. Putin told reporters after the meeting. "The spirit of cooperation and search for compromise prevailed."

NATO's secretary general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, agreed. He said Mr. Putin did not indulge in the attacking language he used against Washington in a speech in Munich in February 2007.

"The discussion was frank and open," Mr. de Hoop Scheffer said. "There was no hiding of views, but the spirit was positive. It is true that NATO enlargement is a contentious issue. The minds do not exactly meet, to put it mildly."

But there was no reason to complain "about 'unhelpful rhetoric,'" he said. "I think the meeting had a constructive atmosphere. You can expect me to criticize unhelpful rhetoric when it occurs, but it did not occur this morning."

Mr. Putin's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, complained that Mr. Putin's opening remarks to NATO leaders were not shown to the news media on the closed-circuit television system at the conference, in contrast to the remarks made earlier by President Viktor A. Yushchenko of Ukraine.

The Spanish foreign minister, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, said that Mr. Putin "showed a willingness for dialogue," adding that Russia would be willing to return to the treaty limiting conventional forces in Europe if Western nations were willing to compromise, presumably by adjusting the treaty limits.

But Mr. Putin also called NATO's promise of eventual membership for Georgia and Ukraine "a direct threat" to Russian security. Russian anger, however, was mitigated by the alliance's refusal to back Mr. Bush's position that the two aspiring members should be welcomed now into the Membership Action Plan, or MAP. The program sets out stiff conditions for membership in the alliance.

While Mr. Bush was supported by about half the alliance's members, including nearly all those of Central and Eastern Europe, he was opposed by Germany, France, Spain, Italy and others.

The Russian-Ukrainian relationship is historically close, but those ties were badly strained with the breakup of the Soviet Union, with many Ukrainians in the eastern part of the country wanting to keep closer ties with Russia than those in the West.

After a meeting on Friday with NATO leaders, Mr. Yushchenko, the Ukrainian president, said his country understood the problems that delayed its bid and remained devoted to democratic values. "I'm not a naïve politician, and I clearly understand what debates and challenges we were speaking about," he said.

Mr. Bush flew from Bucharest to Croatia, which was offered full NATO membership at the conference along with Albania. He will meet with Croatian officials and then fly Saturday to Sochi for a weekend with Mr. Putin.

#### **#4**

**Russian mufti stands by statements  
JTA Brief, April 6, 2008**

A leader of Russia's Muslim community refused to repudiate his statements equating Zionism to fascism.

Nafigullah Ashirov, co-chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis, at a news conference last month called Zionism a cancer and Israel a fascist state, causing a short-lived split between Russia's largest Jewish and Muslim organizations.

Ashirov told the Interfax news service April 3 that the dust-up was provoked by the Federation of Jewish Communities, or FEOR, "those who paint everything in black and white."

"I really do love the Jewish people, but I have a very negative attitude about the aggressive policies of the Israeli state," he said.

FEOR asked the Council of Muftis to denounce Ashirov's original statements. When the council remained silent, FEOR released a statement saying it intended to break off relations with the Islamic group. A meeting last week between the heads of both groups led to a public detente.

Russia's Interreligious Council, other Jewish organizations and the Council of Muftis have chided Ashirov for his comments.

A report from the U.S. State Department released last month described a growing sense of anti-Zionism worldwide that has been conflated with and, to some extent, replaced traditional anti-Semitism.

## **#5**

### **US inks declaration to help Russia join WTO this year**

**Prime-Tass, April 7, 2008**

The U.S. signed on April 6 a joint declaration with Russia to help it join the World Trade Organization (WTO) this year.

"We have confirmed our mutual commitment to help Russia join the WTO on commercially justifiable terms concordant with Russia's economic interests," Putin said at a news conference following a meeting with his U.S. counterpart George W. Bush. "In this light, we expect the U.S. to exempt Russia from the Jackson-Vanick amendment this year and establish permanent normal trade relations with us."

The Jackson-Vanick amendment was passed in 1974 and restricted U.S. trade with countries that limited emigration rights, including the Soviet Union. The amendment is still in force in regard to Russia.

Bush said at the conference that he supported Russia's efforts to join the WTO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and agreed that the country should be exempted from the Jackson-Vanick amendment.

Russia has signed WTO protocols with all WTO members that wished to hold bilateral talks with it, excluding Georgia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Under the declaration, Russia and the U.S. are also expected to sign an agreement allowing them to set up nuclear joint ventures and exchange nuclear materials.

## **#6**

### **'War Horses' Differ, but See Hope for Future Accord**

**By STEVEN LEE MYERS**

**New York Times, April 7, 2008**

President Bush has met with Vladimir V. Putin of Russia more than with any foreign leader other than Tony Blair — 28 times — and has disagreed with few leaders more than he has with Mr. Putin.

On Sunday, meeting for the last time as presidents, they again failed to come to agreement on perhaps the most contentious issue between them: American missile defenses in Europe.

Yet they declared that their open and sometimes testy friendship had left a solid foundation for cooperation between their two countries on that and other international security and economic issues.

Mr. Bush and Mr. Putin — “two old warhorses,” as the American president put it at the NATO summit meeting in Romania on Friday — completed a joint statement on Sunday morning that included language describing how they would in the future address the issue of missile defenses, a statement that administration officials had suggested was unlikely the day before.

The brief statement was part of an 11-page “strategic framework” that largely restated well-established positions on security and economic matters, though Mr. Bush and his aides described the provisions on missile defense as important progress.

“I happen to believe it is a significant breakthrough,” Mr. Bush said, appearing beside Mr. Putin one last time at the presidential retreat here on the Black Sea, “simply because I’ve been very much involved with this issue and know how far it’s come.”

Even agreement on three paragraphs about missile defense remained uncertain until dinner on Saturday night, after Mr. Bush arrived, underscoring the diplomatic delicacy of the issue.

At the dinner, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Russia’s foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, haggled over whether the statement would say “assuaging” Russia concerns rather than simply “easing” them, scribbling the words out on paper before settling on the former, a senior administration official said on the plane on the way home, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was describing diplomatic negotiations.

While Ms. Rice and Mr. Lavrov talked, the two presidents danced with a Russian folk troupe, prompting Mr. Putin to declare Mr. Bush “a brilliant dancer.”

Mr. Putin, for his part, said he welcomed an agreement to hold additional talks on proposed American missile-defense radar, and missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic. But he added, the “devil is in the details” and flatly restated his opposition to American plans that the administration considers a part of Mr. Bush’s global legacy.

“This is not about language; this is not about diplomatic phrasing or wording; this is about the substance of the issue,” Mr. Putin said. “I would like to be very clear on this. Our fundamental attitude to the American plans has not changed.”

With Mr. Putin stepping down from office on May 7, handing the office — if not the reins of power — to his protégé, Dmitri A. Medvedev, the meeting on Sunday had a reflective mood, if not an elegiac one.

Barely a year after the Russian leader compared the Bush administration’s foreign policy to that of the Third Reich, the two leaders clearly strived to avoid any unpleasant public rifts in this meeting, and largely succeeded.

Each praised the other for a respectful personal relationship that has often seemed at odds with the steady deterioration of relations between their countries since 2001, when Mr. Putin offered Russian assistance after the Sept. 11 attacks.

“A lot of times in politics you have people look you in the eye and tell you what’s not on their mind,” Mr. Bush said here on Sunday. “He looks you in the eye and tells you what’s on his mind. He’s been very truthful, and to men, that’s the only way you can find common ground.”

Mr. Putin painted a portrait of the American president that is rarely heard or seen in Russia's state-owned news media. "I've always appreciated his honesty and openness, his willingness to listen to his partner," Mr. Putin said, "and this is precious."

Still, Mr. Putin noted areas in which the countries remain at odds. In addition to missile defense, he cited negotiations for further reductions in nuclear arsenals; the stalled treaty regulating conventional forces in Europe; and the continued expansion of NATO. At its summit meeting last week, NATO invited Croatia and Albania to join the alliance while leaving open the door for still more members, including the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia.

Mr. Bush spent much of his week in Ukraine, Romania and Croatia extolling the virtues of the alliance's expansion to include all democratic nations of Europe, but Mr. Putin denounced the expansion as the "old logic" that perceived Russia as an adversary.

"As Churchill said, if you can't change the subject," he said, "it is a sign of radicalism."

In the agreement, Russia did signal that it was willing to consider cooperating with the United States and NATO on regional missile defense and even a global system, something the Russian leader called "the best guarantee of security of all."

Mr. Bush dismissed a question about whether the agreement on Sunday simply passed the dispute to his successor, possibly one who would not pursue the missile defense program as aggressively as he has. "You can cynically say it's kicking the can down the road," he said. "I don't appreciate that."

Still there was a sense of time passing that even he noted. "It's a moment where life just moves on," he said.

Mr. Bush also met separately with Mr. Medvedev, a far younger man elected in March as the third Russian president after a vote that few outside Russia considered fair, though the administration's criticism was subdued.

Mr. Bush, who famously described looking into Mr. Putin's eyes and getting a sense of his soul when they first met in 2001, described his impressions of the new leader in a less mystical way. He called him "a smart fellow."

Mr. Putin will not disappear from public life. Mr. Medvedev announced that Mr. Putin would be the next prime minister, leaving foreign policy, in accordance with Russia's Constitution, to the president's office, Mr. Putin emphasized.

Mr. Bush said he and the new president would probably meet again at the next meeting of the Group of 8 in Japan in July.

Asked whether relations were better or worse after their roughly parallel terms in office, Mr. Putin noted that, at least, a repeat of the Cuban missile crisis was now impossible. "We always want to have more of a good thing," he said, according to a transcript of the official translation, "and we shouldn't forget that, as we say, the better is the worst enemy of the good."

**#7**

**Is NATO Expansion Bad for Russia?**

**By Uffe Ellemann-Jensen**

**The Moscow Times, April 9, 2008**

Russia's main argument against NATO enlargement is that it would threaten its security. That is nonsense, and Russia knows it.

But the Kremlin has found that behaving like a spoiled child gets results: the right to influence developments in former Soviet countries. In other words, Russia is being allowed to re-assert its sphere of influence -- a concept

that should have been superseded by that of "Europe Whole and Free," which the entire European Union appeared to have embraced when communism collapsed.

But no: 1989 was not the end of history. History threatens to return.

European opponents of a Membership Action Plan for Ukraine and Georgia argue that neither country is ready for NATO membership. Too many question marks about their national unity are said to exist, too many internal conflicts linger, and their records on political and judicial reforms are supposedly dubious.

But the membership process does not imply an automatic right to NATO membership. On the contrary, Membership Action Plans would put heavy demands on Ukraine and Georgia. Both would have to answer a lot of difficult questions and convince others that they are able to live up to NATO's democratic requirements before being allowed to join.

Therefore, it would also be in Russia's interest to see such a process started. Russia has valid concerns regarding the huge Russian-speaking minorities in both countries, and these concerns are best dealt with in the framework of the Membership Action Plan process, where the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's very strict rules on treatment of minorities provide the benchmark.

Indeed, the process of the Membership Action Plan ensured protection for Russian minorities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania -- all former Soviet republics that are now members of NATO.

The crux of the matter is Europe's lack of political will to forge a unified stand toward Russia. This has led the Kremlin to pursue a classic "divide-and-rule" strategy by tempting some big European countries into bilateral agreements -- particularly on energy issues -- that preclude a common EU position.

This is sad -- both for Russia and Europeans -- because it strengthens the hand of those in Moscow who want to pursue a policy of national pride rather than national interest, and it weakens the possibilities of establishing a real common European foreign and security policy.

But it is saddest for the countries that are once again being left out in the cold. NATO is supposed to be a beacon for countries struggling to establish democracy and freedom. The Bucharest summit suggests that the beacon has been switched off.

*Uffe Ellemann-Jensen is the former foreign minister of Denmark. © Project Syndicate.*

**#8**

**Is NATO Expansion Bad for Russia?**

**By Andrei Liakhov**

**The Moscow Times, April 9, 2008**

Until 1991, NATO's primary goal was to contain the threat that was thought to originate from behind its Eastern borders. The goal now seems to be to move the eastern borders as far east as possible. This expansion enhances NATO's strategic defense forces, of which the United States is the main beneficiary. Washington also has detected a major opportunity to prevent Moscow from re-emerging as its rival through Cold War-like containment policies. NATO expansion is viewed by the United States as a key component in this policy.

Any NATO enlargement to include Georgia and Ukraine would inevitably lead to a new arms race in which Russia would clearly be the underdog. Russia has been deprived of much of the clout it had with the Soviet defense industry, particularly the missile research and development facilities based in Ukraine and the ability to mobilize substantial human and financial resources. Making Russia the underdog seems precisely the game that the United States is trying to play at the moment by pushing for Membership Action Plans for Ukraine and Georgia.

Another goal of encircling Russia is to control the export routes of its natural resources. NATO has added energy security to the list of its missions, and it may be interested in controlling Moscow's cash flows and influencing its economic development.

Having started to research the impact of energy supplies on national security much earlier than the West, Moscow has come to the conclusion that it must invest vast sums of money into diversifying export routes to maximize its earnings from hydrocarbon shipments. This became possible only after the meteoric rise in the price of hydrocarbons.

The policy of military and economic containment is ultimately directed at preventing Russia from emerging as a major international power.

Having experienced a history with lengthy periods of near isolation from the rest of the world, Russia could, in theory, survive a NATO encirclement. But the price that the Kremlin would pay to keep up with a new arms race and to safeguard its national interests would be very high.

The Kremlin might resort to former tried and true methods to counter a NATO expansion. The result would likely work against advancing democracy and civil society in the country. As during the Soviet period, a bloated defense budget probably would spark new social tensions. This would also mean that the Kremlin would take an even tougher stance toward the West, leading inevitably to a new Cold War.

We should be worried about NATO's intent to pursue the Membership Action Plan for Georgia and Ukraine. This will deal a serious blow to plans by President-elect Dmitry Medvedev and President Vladimir Putin to turn Russia into a democratic, prosperous state.

*Andrei Liakhov, an adviser to the president of the Soviet Union from 1990 to 1991, is a London-based consultant.*

## **#9**

### **Photo Ops and Back Patting Aren't Enough The Moscow Times Editorial, April 10, 2008**

After weeks of predictions -- and great expectations -- on both sides of the ocean that Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin would sign a strategic document in Sochi, the two leaders walked away with only one document titled "U.S.-Russia Strategic Declaration."

The declaration offers little substance in terms of resolving the conflicting Russian and U.S. positions on several key issues. The document only pledges that the two sides will continue to try to reach a compromise on enduring problems, such as U.S. plans to deploy a missile-defense system in Central Europe, an extension to the Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty and the fates of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

The position of the Bush administration is that the missile-defense system needs to be deployed to protect against an attack from Iran. Russia's position is that there is no imminent Iranian threat and that the planned missile-defense system could be reconfigured to be used against Russian missiles. In addition, the Kremlin believes that neither the INF nor the CFE will serve Russia's interests, unless the countries that have developed intermediate-range missiles join the INF and all NATO countries ratify the CFE.

When it comes to national interests, neither country is interested in undermining the international arms control security and stability that the INF and CFE provide. Nor are the two countries interested in the emergence of new nuclear powers, whether it is Iran or any other country.

But it takes mutual trust for the negotiators to be flexible enough to move from their official negotiating positions to discuss their real interests. Over the past eight years, Bush and Putin have developed a relationship built on trust, and they could have used this trust in their Sochi negotiations to reach a compromise on missile defense, arms control agreements and NATO expansion. But in Sochi, this opportunity was wasted.

The only thing that the summit produced was a news conference, friendly pats on the back, photo opportunities and a nonbinding declaration. All of the difficult and divisive bilateral issues will be left to Bush's and Putin's successors to resolve.

Another problem is that the two presidents did not create any permanent bilateral forums in which lower-level diplomats could regularly interact and develop trust and cooperation between the two administrations.

Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have expressed interest in a meaningful dialogue with President-elect Dmitry Medvedev. But regardless of who wins the U.S. presidential election, it will require a lot of time and good will to develop a trusting relationship with Medvedev. It will take even longer if John McCain, a harsh critic of Putin, becomes the next U.S. president.

## **#10**

### **Why Moscow Doesn't Have a Lot of Friends**

**By Georgy Bovt**

**The Moscow Times, April 10, 2008**

Some members of Moscow's political establishment considered the recent NATO summit in Bucharest a partial victory since Georgia and Ukraine were not invited to join the alliance. But far from saying "no," NATO promised that these countries would eventually become members.

But the main questions for Moscow are: Why are two members of the Commonwealth of Independent States so eager to join NATO? Why do our allies want to establish closer ties with the West? Why does the prospect of better relations with Russia hold so little appeal?

Russia currently has only two staunch allies among CIS countries. The first is Armenia -- a country that is going through difficult economic times, is dependent upon Russia for its energy supplies and has chilly relations with most of its other neighbors. Russia's other ally is Belarus, a rogue state ruled by a dictator with whom even Moscow sometimes has difficulty maintaining a dialogue.

The Kremlin has a few theories as to why the former Soviet republics find NATO membership so appealing. The most popular explanation is the conspiracy theory. This scenario has the United States continuing its Cold War struggle for global influence by displacing Russia as the dominant player in the CIS region. According to this theory, Washington wins the favor of the political elite in the republics and then foments color revolutions against Moscow to prevent it from regaining power. Conspiracy theorists believe that the United States' main objective is to seize Russia's limitless natural resources and take direct control of the country, or else to exercise indirect control by reducing Russia to an "appendage of the West" that submissively supplies it with raw materials.

According to this theory, the foreign policy of the United States and its allies reflects a single aim: to encroach upon Russia using every weapon in its arsenal -- propaganda, economic pressure and even direct military intervention.

A competing theory holds that the political elite in the former Soviet republics are the ones pushing for NATO's expansion. These leaders supposedly view their countries as being too small to have any voice among European nations unless they gain membership in powerful international organizations such as NATO or the European Union. Some among the Russian elite believe that Ukraine and Georgia fear losing their status as independent countries unless they join NATO or the European Union.

These different views reflect the worldviews of the various factions within Russia's political elite. Any attempt to dissuade them from these convictions is futile. Anti-Western, and especially anti-U.S., sentiment has reached such heights that the Kremlin summarily dismisses worthy arguments without even listening.

While these theorists heap scorn on the West, they don't bother to ask whether Russia could be a more appealing partner for its neighbors. Using the energy card as a negotiating tool against other countries clearly won't do the trick. Neither will preaching about the virtues of a multipolar world and the vices of a U.S.-led

unipolar world, and taking every possible opportunity to criticize the West while rejecting any constructive proposals it puts forward.

Russia must first offer its own society -- and only later the world -- an attractive model for development that other countries would want to follow. The government should formulate a set of political principles that it would be able to manifest in actual deeds, not just words. Only then can these values and principles gradually take root in Russian society.

Then, Moscow's foreign policy would serve as a logical continuation of those principles practiced at home. Unfortunately, this strategy is not part of the Kremlin's agenda.

Georgy Bovt is a political analyst and hosts a radio program on City-FM.

**#11**

**New St. Petersburg shul promotes Pesach**

**By Jessica Bachman**

**JTA, April 7, 2008**

The taste of liberation is spreading in St. Petersburg. It tastes like a saltless cracker: matzah.

That's because, with the recent opening of St. Petersburg's new synagogue on the outskirts of the city, many of the 20,000 or so Jews who live in nearby neighborhoods will be celebrating Passover for the first time, local Jewish outreach officials say.

"Ninety-five percent of the Jews who have started coming here -- 95 percent -- never went to any synagogue before," said Rabbi Benzion Lipsker, spiritual leader of the new shul at Maor, the Jewish community center that opened here in December 2006.

The Maor synagogue officially opened March 16 in the city's northwest Vyborgsky region, where 20 percent of St. Petersburg's Jews live.

Igor Shapiro, Maor's program coordinator, says the JCC is trying to reach area Jews to teach them Jewish traditions. Passover presents an ideal opportunity. "We will call, e-mail or text-message each person we have in our database and invite them to celebrate Passover with us," he said.

Shapiro is emblematic of the kinds of Jews he is trying to reach: This year will be his first-ever seder too.

"I grew up in this part of the city," he told JTA. "I am Jewish. My patronymic is Israelovich, but I had never been to a synagogue until last year. I am new to all this."

Like many middle-aged Russian Jews, Shapiro vaguely recalls his grandparents and great-grandparents baking matzah at Passover, but his familiarity with the holiday stops there.

After seeing an advertisement for the JCC program coordinator position, Shapiro said he decided to end his career in sales, return to his roots and work to "help the Jewish people." He joined Maor in October.

His outreach mission is mirrored elsewhere in St. Petersburg, where Jewish organizations are figuring out ways to involve more Jews in the celebration of Passover.

Lipsker said establishing a center for Jewish life in the city's northwest Vyborgsky region, rather than merely relying on the synagogue downtown, is key to reaching out to the unaffiliated Jews here.

"We brought the synagogue to the people," said Lipsker, who is also the JCC's director. "Many of the Jews who came to us when we opened didn't know how to open a prayer book."

Now, he said, some 60 to 70 locals participate in the center's activities, and about 30 come regularly to pray. "These Jews now know that a synagogue is not a scary place," Lipsker said. "It is not inaccessible. It is here for everyone, in their palms."

Lipsker estimates that 150 to 200 guests will attend the synagogue's communal Passover seder on April 19. He hopes the holiday will bring even more Jews from the area into the Jewish community center and out of their religion-free Soviet past.

"Many families don't know how to have a seder and then, of course, there are many Jews here without families," Lipsker said. "So we will have a large seder at Maor. All the Jews that come here are one family."

Elsewhere in the city, at the expansive Yesod JCC, project coordinator Marina Delnik is organizing the filming of a Passover video that features local students as actors.

The film is divided into five four-minute segments showing how students react when confronted with memories or thoughts about their ancestors.

"After each segment we will turn off the movie and the students will discuss what they saw," Delnik said. "We will ask them questions, such as, 'What will happen to this student? Why did he react in that way? What would you do if you were in their shoes?'"

"The idea is to familiarize the students with Passover and remind them of the importance of knowing one's family history and ancestry."

Each Passover film and discussion meeting, from April 15 to 17, will be followed by a group matzah-baking class. Yesod has invited middle school and high school classes from local Jewish and non-Jewish schools to participate.

Chesed Avraham, a Jewish welfare center, also will be running activities aimed at familiarizing the elderly Jews of St. Petersburg with Passover traditions.

"When a Jewish holiday approaches, we begin introducing it even a few weeks before the actual holiday," said Svetlana Bernstein, the director of Chesed Avraham's day center for Jews older than 70. "The people we serve grew up under Soviet rule, under atheistic ideology, so they have practically no sense of Jewish traditions."

Fourteen groups of seniors participate in Chesed Avraham's program, with the 20 to 30 participants in each group from a different city neighborhood. The seniors visit the center every two weeks.

Because most of the groups will not be at the center to observe the first and second seders on April 19 and 20, Bernstein has planned model seders to be held before the holiday.

"We will prepare a seder plate on each day and our specialists, lecturers and volunteers will explain to them the significance of the holiday," she said. "We will tell the story of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt and show how we celebrate our freedom during Passover."

The Grand Choral Synagogue in downtown St. Petersburg also will be hosting a Passover seder, on April 19.

## **#12**

### **Residential construction project damages Jewish cemetery in Ukraine**

**By Anshel Pfeffer,  
Ha'aretz, April 6, 2008**

An ancient Jewish cemetery in the Ukraine sustained damage last week by construction work carried out at the site. A group of ultra-Orthodox Jews caused a commotion by attempting to stop the construction work with their bodies.

The cemetery, located in the Ukrainian city of Vinnitsa, is one of two Jewish cemeteries in the city. The ancient cemetery served the Jewish community until about a century ago and now stands neglected and abandoned. Several months ago, local Jewish community leaders tried to get municipal approval to transfer control over the site from local authorities to the Jewish community, so that it could renovate it.

However, despite early agreements on the subject, last week construction began on a residential project planned for the site of the cemetery. The construction work resulted in tombstones being desecrated and graves being dug up.

Shaul Horovitz, a Chabad representative, summoned a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews from the nearby town of Uman, who physically tried to stop the construction. The disturbance stopped the work temporarily. In a meeting with Vinnitsa mayor Vladimir Grossman, who is himself Jewish, community leaders were promised that the construction would cease, but work continued Friday, after the Hasidim left the site.

The community is now trying to pressure Ukraine via the American embassy and European Union institutions. It hopes that international pressure will lead the Ukrainian government, which seeks to join NATO and the EU, to stop the project.

The city of Vinnitsa was once considered a significant Jewish center, with about 40,000 residents, up until World War II. With the German invasion of the USSR, some of Vinnitsa's Jews were drafted into the Red army, while around 25,000 others were rounded up by the Nazis and sent to their deaths. Many of the Jews who returned to live in the city after the war came to Israel as part of the wave of immigration in the 1990s, and today Vinnitsa is home to approximately 4,000 Jews.

### **#13**

#### **Iranian nuclear threat to top EJC talks with EU Slovenian presidency European Jewish Press, April 6, 2008**

A delegation from the European Jewish Congress (EJC) will hold high-level discussions with the Slovenian European Union presidency in Ljubljana next week. The talks, on April 8-9, are aimed at encouraging European responses to the Iranian nuclear threat, combat xenophobia and anti-Semitism and promoting the EU strategic, political and diplomatic relations with Israel, the EJC said.

The delegation, led by the pan-European Jewish group's president, Moshe Kantor, will meet with Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, who currently chairs the EU Council, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, France Cukjati, President of the Slovenian parliament and President Milan Kucan.

"These meetings are part of an ongoing initiative by the EJC and President Kantor to coordinate an organized effort regarding the Iranian nuclear threat," the EJC said.

Kantor declared ahead of the talks: "If Iran, the center of world terror today, goes nuclear, threats of terrorist attacks in Europe will make peaceful life here unthinkable."

He called on the EU to speed implementation of sanctions against business interests cooperating with Iran's nuclear program, as "it is only encouraging Iranian disregard of international pressure to cease its nuclear program."

"A nuclear Iran will accelerate the race for nuclear weapons among its neighbors and further destabilize world peace," Kantor said.

The EJC president has recently met with several other EU leaders including Germany's Chancellor Merkel, Greece's President Karolos Papoulias and Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pottering, as well as Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In their meetings with the EU presidency, the EJC delegation will also emphasize the need for concrete educational efforts to inform the younger generations about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism “as a means to confront the rise of extreme right. “

They will lobby to support specific legislation within the EU to enact and enforce laws specifically confronting crimes motivated by hate.

The European Jewish Congress, which is based in Paris, federates 40 elected leaders of national Jewish communities in Europe.

#### **#14**

#### **Further stability can boost prospects for Georgian-Abkhaz peace – UN report UN News Center, April 4, 2008**

Unlike the tensions that characterized much of the last two years, the past few months have witnessed a relatively stable security situation along the ceasefire line between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, which could contribute to improving relations between the parties, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in a new report.

“The high tensions that characterized much of 2006 and 2007 have not served the interest of the peace process. Quite the contrary, they have contributed to further narrowing the opportunities for a dialogue already undercut by deep mutual suspicions,” Mr. Ban writes in his latest report to the Security Council.

He says “a period of sustained stability along the ceasefire line and in the Kodori Valley would improve the prospect of repairing the much deteriorated relationship between the two sides.”

Despite the efforts of Mr. Ban’s Special Representative, Jean Arnault, the negotiation process remains suspended, given the Abkhaz side’s insistence on the withdrawal of Georgian armed personnel from the upper Kodori Valley as a precondition for the resumption of negotiations with the Georgian side, the report states.

At its February meeting in Geneva, the Secretary-General’s Group of Friends called for the resumption of security meetings between the sides, the UN mission (UNOMIG) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force. The Group also expressed its disappointment at the lack of progress in implementing the proposals it had set out last year to boost confidence between the parties.

“At the same time, the Friends noted the fact that there appeared to be common ground with regard to the necessity, after one year of escalating mistrust, to focus on the gradual restoration of a working relationship between the sides across a range of issues,” states the report.

The Secretary-General too calls on the sides to implement the confidence-building measures, noting that “small steps and partial successes are essential to the sustainability of protracted peace processes, and the Georgian-Abkhaz process certainly qualifies as such.”

Mr. Ban also welcomes the dialogue between the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the CIS peacekeeping force and UNOMIG, which has been taking place regularly on the Zugdidi side of the ceasefire line, and hopes that the regular meetings on security issues involving the Georgian and Abkhaz sides will soon follow.

In light of the present situation and the important role UNOMIG plays in promoting stability in the zone of conflict, practical cooperation between the sides and the restoration of dialogue, the Secretary-General recommends that its mandate be extended for another six months, until 15 October.

#### **#15**

#### **Azerbaijani cooperation with Estonia The Baltic Times, April 03, 2008**

Azerbaijan's leaders emphasized the importance of cooperation with Estonia during meetings with Deputy Speaker of the Estonian parliament Kristiina Ojuland.

The Deputy Speaker also showed support for Azerbaijan's admission to NATO.

"As regards the issue of the territorial integrity, Estonia supports Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, wants the refugees to return to their native lands and supports peaceful settlement of the conflict. Estonia also supports Azerbaijan's policy of integration into NATO. If Azerbaijan shows great interest in admission to NATO, Estonia is ready to offer any assistance to your country basing on its experience", she said.

According to the local news agency APA, the chairman of the Azerbaijani parliament, Ogtai Assadov, said he considers development of relations with Estonia very important.

He noted that interparliamentary cooperation is expanding and the development of economic and political ties promotes cultural cooperation, citing days of Azerbaijani culture in Estonia as an example.

The minister for economic development, Heidar Babayev, likewise underlined cooperation in Wednesday's meeting with Ojuland. The two talked about collaboration in the field of information technology and Estonian entrepreneurs' opportunities for investing in Azerbaijan.

Ojuland affirmed Estonia's readiness to forge closer ties and called the agreement to avoid double taxation as a significant step toward closer economic and trade cooperation.

#### **#16**

#### **Tajikistan ordered to repay \$47m**

**BBC News, April 4, 2008**

An IMF source told the BBC that this was one of the worst cases of misreporting it had seen.

Tajikistan's National Bank has admitted giving the fund false information. It said it had \$500m in reserves when it only had \$115m, to gain more loans.

The bank defended the move, saying the loans were needed to fund agriculture.

The bank's chairman, Sharif Rahimzada, said: "In European countries, governments pay \$3 a day to look after a cow. But we didn't have that capacity then, neither do we have it now.

"Our budget is very small, but we have to assist our agriculture, and this was one way of assisting agriculture."

The revelation comes just as Tajikistan has had one of its most severe winters in five decades, which has hit agricultural output hard.

The cost of food has risen sharply risen, due in part to increasing prices worldwide.

Some humanitarian agencies say Central Asia's poorest nation is heading towards catastrophe.

#### **#17**

#### **Moldovan president participates in NATO Summit in Bucharest**

**Moldpres, April 3, 2008**

President Vladimir Voronin today participated in the Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), held in Bucharest, according to the presidential press service.

In a speech given within the meeting, the president said that Moldova does its utmost to attract the international community's attention to the uncertain situation created by the conflict in the country's eastern region, which over the last 16 years, has remained a zone of instability, which affects regional security.

The head of state said the Transnistrian problem, which fuels a potential of insecurity and instability not only for Moldova's territory, but also for the whole region, is still unsettled. The regional-scale effects of this conflict, the fact that it blocks Moldova's modernisation, as well as the interference of Transnistria-related problems with up-to-date international security issues, such as the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE Treaty), NATO's extension, anti-missile defense systems in Europe and Kosovo are obvious, Vladimir Voronin specified.

Vladimir Voronin reconfirmed Moldova's official position on the occasion of this particularly important event debating security issues: "We want to identify a viable solution to the Transnistrian problem, which should be focused on the demilitarisation and the prohibition of foreign troops and military facilities on our national territory, in line with the recognized status of Moldova's neutrality, as well as giving a fair status to the Transnistrian region within a sovereign, indivisible and territorially united Moldova."

The president reiterated the fact that, 17 years after the proclamation of its independence, Moldova seeks the support of the international community in order to avoid destructive polemics on our national identity and present borders, so as to focus on the achievement of our pro-European aspirations, as well as more and more active involvement of all the sides for the recognition of Moldova's neutrality and promotion of the country's reintegration on the basis of the international law.

Within the NATO summit, Vladimir Voronin held discussions with Latvian President Valdis Zatlers and Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus. The officials focused on Moldova's cooperation ties with Latvia and Lithuania and the prospects of extending and deepening the country's collaboration with the two Baltic states.

The Moldovan president thanked both the Latvian authorities and the Lithuanian leadership for the firm support given Moldova to make the country's European integration choice come true. The head of state stressed the Moldovan side's increased interest in continuing cooperation in the field of promoting the European standards by taking over the advanced European integration experience of the two states.

President Vladimir Voronin returns to Chisinau today evening.

**#18**  
**NATO: Uzbek, Turkmen Presidents Offer Cooperation**  
**By Bruce Pannier**  
**RFE/RL, April 4, 2008**

Uzbek President Islam Karimov indicated a willingness to increase his country's cooperation with NATO to aid efforts in Afghanistan.

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov spoke about Afghanistan and met with the Afghan and U.S. presidents, with whom energy was a major topic of discussion.

Berdymukhammedov and Karimov could play significant roles in NATO plans for Afghanistan -- which shares borders with both their countries -- and both Central Asian leaders hammered home this point during their speeches in Bucharest.

NATO is hoping to establish a land corridor that would run from Russia through Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to deliver nonmilitary materiel to Afghanistan. Karimov said he is interested in his country participating in the land route, mentioning an agreement signed in February with Germany, which has troops stationed at a small military base in Termez, Uzbekistan, concerning the railway transit of German cargo via Uzbekistan.

Matthew Clements, the Eurasia editor at the London-based Jane's Information Group, says the route makes sense. "What should be pointed out is that while it may be a risky route politically, the other overland route is through Pakistan and through the Northwest Frontier Province, and this is obviously not completely desirable from a NATO or U.S. perspective because of the security issues," Clements says. "Just recently, a number of oil tankers were blown up at a border crossing point in an ambush by Pakistani militants."

## Tashkent's Tack

Depending on Uzbekistan might be regarded as risky by some NATO members, given that U.S. troops were ordered to leave an Uzbek military base in 2005 after official U.S. criticism of the Uzbek government's deadly crackdown against protesters in the eastern city of Andijon earlier that year.

But Clements suggests that such concerns might be overblown.

"We've seen the removal of the U.S. air base there previously, following [Western] criticism after Andijon, and it's very difficult to see how that could happen again," Clements says. "There does seem to be an effort in certain factions of the West to re-engage Uzbekistan and to almost overlook its human rights situation. It looks like now, because of the strategic interest in getting this overland route, the U.S. is willing to talk to them again."

Karimov has put forward his own proposal to help establish stability in Afghanistan: resurrecting the "6+2" idea of a decade ago. The group involved Afghanistan's neighbors -- Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran -- with Russia and the United States attempting to get Afghanistan's Taliban movement and the United Front (aka Northern Alliance) to agree to a peace deal. The group was never able to broker a successful cease-fire, however, and disbanded after U.S. forces chased the Taliban from power in late 2001. Karimov proposed reforming the group as the "6+3" to include NATO in future talks.

Clements says any new group would probably fare no better than the previous group but that such a format could at least give the Central Asian states a greater voice in Afghan events.

"The viability of it would still be in question because exactly how much the Central Asian states can achieve in their policy towards Afghanistan is always going to be questionable," Clements says. "I think there is a desire from the Central Asian countries to have some sort of say, some sort of influence on Afghanistan. I think there is a growing realization between [the Central Asian states] and Russia that the insecurity in Afghanistan is actually no good for them, especially in terms of opium trafficking, which is a big problem for the Central Asian countries and Russia."

Berdymukhammedov pointed out that his country is already helping Afghanistan by supplying electricity to northern areas and sending humanitarian aid that includes diesel fuel and flour. But the Turkmen president ventured beyond the boundaries set for Turkmenistan's foreign policy by his predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov, who died in late 2006.

## Ashgabat's Departure

In comments appearing in Turkmen state media on April 4, Berdymukhammedov noted the importance of the NATO summit, which he said Turkmenistan viewed as a "good opportunity for an exchange of opinions about the problems of international security."

Clements says Berdymukhammedov's statements on international security are "pretty significant" and represent a marked departure from those of the late President Niyazov, who repeatedly said Turkmenistan was only interested in trade and economic partnerships with other countries.

"Actually the fact that he was at a NATO summit is also extremely significant considering the highly isolationist policy of Niyazov before this," Clements says, "and the talk about security certainly is another departure from Niyazov's previous policies. So yes, it's very significant and I think it really illustrates Berdymukhammedov's desire to become more fully involved in the international community."

Once in Bucharest, of course, Berdymukhammedov used the NATO summit as a platform to promote his country's energy resources. He spoke about the long-proposed Turkmen-Afghan-Pakistan-India natural-gas pipeline and met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai to discuss the export route.

Talks between NATO and both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are still needed to firm up the details of this new cooperation, but it appears both the alliance and the two presidents will come away from this summit with the feeling of having improved relations.

#### Turkmen-U.S. Meeting

Berdymukhammedov met with U.S. President George W. Bush on the sidelines of the summit. The two men discussed Turkmen energy exports, and Berdymukhammedov reportedly told his U.S. counterpart that Turkmenistan was interested in multiple export routes for its energy resources.

Turkmenistan is rich in natural gas and, to a lesser extent, oil; but it has limited possibilities to ship it to markets. Currently the only pipelines out of Turkmenistan pass through Russia, with the exception of a small pipeline leading to Iran and a gas pipeline to China that will become operational next year. European states in particular are trying to get Turkmenistan to join pipeline projects to export gas to Europe but have been outmaneuvered recently by Russia's Gazprom.

Clements says Berdymukhammedov's talk with Bush brings new hope that projects like the proposed Nabucco pipeline might still be possible, if Turkmen officials believe they are getting "a good deal." He says that the Bucharest meeting could at least help maintain some pressure to prevent those plans from disappearing altogether.

"Directly stating this to Bush certainly is more significant than these low-level talks, and could suggest more impetus for them to boost the Nabucco project," Clements says. "[But] I think that unless we see genuine details on what the deal could be, it still would be hard to suggest that Turkmenistan isn't focused much more on Russia and China at the moment in terms of its energy exports. I think what he's doing here is keeping alive the possibility that it could happen in the future."

#### #19

##### **Lukashenka expresses certainty that Belarus will normalize relations with USA, EU Belorusskie Novosti, April 4, 2008**

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has expressed certainty that Belarus would normalize its relations with the United States and the European Union in the future.

"We want to quarrel with no one, neither with the West nor with the East," official information sources quoted him as saying in an interview with Vietnamese reporters on April 4. "I believe that relations with Americans will normalize, there are prospects for the normalization of relations with the European Union."

"I don't see any problems in relations between Belarus and the rest of the world," he said.

Mr. Lukashenka described the United States' sanctions imposed on the Belnaftakhim petrochemical conglomerate as pressure but said that "these are futile attempts." "We will find markets for our products," he was quoted as saying.

The Belarusian leader reportedly said that "if they had not interfered with Belarus' efforts to develop the economy, it would have grown at an even faster pace."

#### #20

##### **US says slams Belarus call for more embassy staff cuts AFP, April 4, 2008**

A request from Belarus to the United States to further cut US embassy staff in Minsk is "unwarranted and unjustified," a US official said Friday.

"We believe this latest request, like several before it, is unwarranted and unjustified," State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey told reporters, suggesting Washington may not comply with it.

"We will certainly be continuing to discuss that issue with the government of Belarus, but I'm aware of no plans to make such a drawdown of embassy staff," Casey added.

Belarus said Wednesday it was cutting staff in its Washington embassy to seven and demanded the United States reciprocate, in an ongoing row over US sanctions against the ex-Soviet state for human rights abuses.

The move would mean a further reduction of 10 diplomats at the US embassy in Minsk, which last month withdrew ambassador Karen Stewart and cut staff from 27 to 17 at Belarus' request.

The United States has imposed sanctions on the foreign assets of Belneftekhim to pressure the authoritarian government of President Alexander Lukashenko to allow democratic freedoms and release political prisoners.

## **#21 Belarus Hosts Rabbi's Conference for First Time FEOR, April 11 2008**

For the first time ever, rabbis serving in Belarus with the Chabad movement convened in Belarus. The meeting, which took place in Mogilev, has just wrapped up and went over successfully.

"The purpose of the Congress, which took place from March 26th to 28th, was to review the achievements of the work being done by rabbis in Belarus over the year 2007," explained Rabbi Mendel Alperovich, a Chabad Lubavitch emissary serving in the city of Mogilev. But the reach of participants extended even further, some of the guests having traveled here for this event from the USA or Israel.

During the gathering, attendees evaluated the work carried out by the Jewish communities across Belarus. "During meetings we discussed issues related to improving our work on the spiritual front and in cooperating with the Chairmen of the respective Jewish communities," commented Rabbi Alperovich. Conference-goers agreed amongst themselves that they would convene once again in four months' time.

"Belarus is a place where we rabbis are able to work peacefully and agreeably," underlined Rabbi Alperovich. The Jewish community of Mogilev hosted a tour of the Synagogue and Ohr Avner Chabad Day School. Another highlight of the visit was an informal meeting with representatives from the Embassy of Israel in Belarus, Chairmen and other laymen from local Jewish communities, as well as businessmen who support the community.

Chabad Lubavitch emissaries and representatives in Belarus, just as the other countries of the Former Soviet Union, are supported through a grant from the Rohr Foundation, headed by Messrs. George and Sami Rohr of Florida and NY respectively. This assistance covers the expenses associated with the rabbis presence in the region, thus offsetting the cost that would otherwise fall to local Jewish communities

## **#22 Belarusan children mark Israel's 60th JTA Brief, April 9, 2008**

Children in Belarus are celebrating Israel's 60th anniversary

A four-day event for children, "Israel: Young Country with Ancient History," is being held in the capital city of Minsk. The event was organized by the cultural and information center of the Israeli Embassy and the Minsk Central Children's Library.

"Our main aim is to foster tolerance among Belarusan children," a representative of the embassy's Israeli cultural and information center told JTA. "They can also learn interesting facts about Israel."

The event includes a CD presentation about Israel, an exhibition of posters of the works of well-known Israeli artists and a display of Israeli books. Children are also taking part in quizzes about Israel. The winners will receive prizes on Thursday, the last day of the event.

"Children participating in the event are not necessarily Jewish children," the embassy representative said. "It's very important for us to tell the young people of all nationalities that live in Belarus about Israel."

## **#23**

### **Sargsyan Pledges to Work With Foes**

**Reuters, April 10, 2008**

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan promised at his inauguration Wednesday to heal rifts with his opponents, one month after clashes between police and protesters killed eight people.

Sargsyan was sworn in as president at Yerevan's opera house in front of an audience of hundreds including parliamentarians and foreign guests.

"This ceremony takes place about a month after painful events, which inflicted wounds that are still fresh," Sargsyan said in a speech.

"These wounds caused pain and bitterness to all of us. Today, I urge everybody to look forward, together, to seek and find the path of reconciliation, of development, for the future of Armenia."

Anti-government protesters say Sargsyan and his ally, former President Robert Kocharyan, rigged the Feb. 19 presidential election. Sargsyan was declared winner of the vote with around 53 percent, beating his nearest challenger, who received about 21.5 percent.

## **#24**

### **UZBEKISTAN: CHIEF RABBI FACES EXPULSION**

**By Mushfig Bayram**

**Forum 18 News Service, April 10, 2008**

The Justice Ministry has refused to renew the accreditation of Uzbekistan's Chief Rabbi, Abe David Gurevich, and one of his colleagues, Forum 18 News Service has learned. The rejection of the accreditation renewal for him and for Malka Gurevich, who also works for the Tashkent branch of the Hasidic World Lubavitch Movement, came in a 10 April letter from the Justice Ministry. "Today I received the letter saying that I was not qualified to get the renewal of my accreditation," the Chief Rabbi told Forum 18 from the Uzbek capital on 10 April. He complained that the letter did not specify exactly what the reasons for the denial were. The community is now concerned that their Chief Rabbi might be forced to leave Uzbekistan.

The move against Gurevich comes in the midst of harassment of other faiths in Uzbekistan, including Muslims, Protestant Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses. Forum 18 tried to find out from the government's Religious Affairs Committee why so many religious communities are facing harassment, but Committee official Begzot Kadyrov told Forum 18 not to "disturb us with stupid questions about religious liberties" (see F18 News 10 April 2008 <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1112](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1112)>).

The one-page Ministry of Justice letter, of which Forum 18 has seen a copy, states that Gurevich and his colleague exceeded their authority during their work in Uzbekistan, and that their activities went beyond the framework of the purpose and tasks of their organisation as indicated in its charter. The letter was signed by Jalol Abdusattarov, the head of the Ministry's Department for Public Associations and Religious Organisations.

Forum 18 tried to reach Abdusattarov on 10 April to find out why Gurevich and his colleague were being denied accreditation. Abdusattarov's assistant, who would not give his name, said Abdusattarov was not in the office and asked Forum 18 to call back. However, each time Forum 18 did so, Abdusattarov was not there to answer the call.

Gurevich told Forum 18 that Abdusattarov had confirmed to him on 4 April that the Ministry was considering his request to renew the accreditation. However, the Chief Rabbi added that since receiving the rejection letter, he has had no success trying to discuss the issue with the Ministry. "I have not been able to reach Abdusattarov to ask him about the reasons," Gurevich told Forum 18. "Each time I call the Ministry someone picks up the phone and says he is not there."

Gurevich told Forum 18 that he went through the same process in 1998, when the authorities would not renew his accreditation. "They did the same things with me 10 years ago," he told Forum 18. "But then they came back and apologised for the mistake which was made by not renewing my accreditation."

Asked why he thought he was being denied accreditation now, Gurevich pointed to articles about him in the news media alleging that he had misused finances donated for the community. The articles appeared shortly before the Ministry refused to renew his accreditation.

"I have checked up and could not find the authors of some of the articles, and I believe that these were made-up names," Gurevich said. "The Ministry knows very well that I receive funds for charity from Jewish organisations in the US and Russia." The authorities have means to check up on their bank account in Uzbekistan and do so regularly, Gurevich pointed out. "What has happened now that all of a sudden there is a talk about the finances?"

The problems for Gurevich first surfaced in an article in the government-supported website Gorizont.uz on 3 April (<[http://gorizont.uz/index.php?id\\_=1061](http://gorizont.uz/index.php?id_=1061)>). The article accuses Gurevich of embezzling funds entrusted to him, violating Uzbekistan's laws by the fact that his organisation's premises are not at the officially-registered address, and hindering Jews of Uzbek nationality from becoming new leaders of the Jewish community. "Why can't an Uzbek national become the new leader of the Jewish community?" the article asks rhetorically.

A follow-up article on the government-sponsored press-uz.info website on 6 April quoted an anonymous Justice Ministry source as declaring that Gurevich had not corrected "crude violations of the law", despite "repeated demands" by the Ministry. It also said Gurevich uses an official stamp claiming to represent the Rabbinate, even though no such entity is legally recognised in Uzbekistan. "He declares that the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan don't apply to him," the article quoted the anonymous official as declaring.

Gurevich said the articles were followed by a visit from the Religious Affairs Committee and Justice Ministry officials for a check-up on 7 April. "The officials told us that it was part of planned check-ups," he reported. "But we were not warned about it and no check-ups were planned." The officials checked the accounts and the school, found everything was in order and left, he said.

Russian-born Gurevich, who carries a United States and an Israeli passport, has worked in Uzbekistan since 1990. He has been instrumental in reviving Jewish life in the country, opening a yeshivah, a kollel where the Torah can be studied, and a day school for 350 students, the only Jewish school in Tashkent. He has also organised summer camps, youth clubs and humanitarian aid for the poor. The community estimates the number of Jews in Tashkent at more than 20,000.

The Rabbinate was abolished when Uzbekistan's Religion Law changed in 1998.

Since then the Justice Ministry has refused to re-register it, despite the request of the Jewish community.

In recent years the Uzbek authorities have deported a number of foreign citizens to curtail their activities in local religious communities. Among recent cases, in June 2007 a Tajik citizen who had lived in Uzbekistan for ten years was deported to punish her for her involvement in a Pentecostal Christian congregation.

Speaking to press-uz.info on 2 April, Abdusattarov of the Justice Ministry also threatened to revoke the legal status of another Jewish charity, the local branch of the Joint Distribution Committee. He warned that "violations" in its activity needed to be corrected.

In recent years the Uzbek authorities have closed down a whole range of local and foreign charities and NGOs that were religiously-affiliated or which the government suspected of being religiously-affiliated.