



**WASHINGTON, D.C. May 9, 2008**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

In Brief: Continuing developments in Russia and Belarus

Dear Friend,

Two thousand dignitaries, including Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim clergy, attended a lavish inauguration ceremony at the Great Kremlin Palace on May 7 for Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's third post-Soviet President. In his six-minute address, President Medvedev emphasized the importance of rule of law for achieving civil and economic freedom. On May 8, the State Duma confirmed Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister, effectively formalizing their power sharing arrangement.

In this week's "In Brief" an article ("Despite anti-Semitism Russia lures back Jews") discusses the tens of thousands of Jews who are returning to Russia, to take advantage of its economic boom and improved standard of living. But, while Western-style supermarkets, malls, trendy restaurants and internet cafes abound, anti-Semitism and xenophobia are also thriving. Neo-Nazi and skinhead attacks, synagogue and cemetery vandalism, and anti-Semitic rhetoric in the Presidential campaign have all contributed to a sense of unease, despite improvements in lifestyle and economic opportunity.

We hope that in the coming days the new President and Prime Minister will move quickly to protect the Jewish minority and other minorities in the Russian Federation through aggressive investigation and prosecution of the skinhead and other anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements in Russian society.

In other news, we continue to follow closely the escalating tensions between the U.S. and Belarus governments. In the latest incident, Belarus expelled ten American diplomats from the U.S. Embassy in Minsk. While Belarus Jewish communities have not experienced any negative effects from this political turmoil, the community continues to experience anti-Semitic incidents, like the [cemetery desecration in Gomel](#) and the [vandalized Holocaust memorial in Slutsk](#).

NCSJ met with Minsk Jewish community leaders during their visit to Washington last week and reiterated our commitment to their well-being and security. An NCSJ leadership mission will travel to Belarus and Moldova next week and we will keep you informed regarding any new developments.

Sincerely,

Lesley Weiss  
Director of Community Services  
and Cultural Affairs



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. May 9, 2008

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## **#1**

### **Despite anti-Semitism, Russia lures back Jews By Amie Ferris-Rotman and Conor Sweeney Reuters, May 5, 2008**

Tens of thousands of Jews who fled oppression in the former Soviet Union are returning to Russia to make the most of an economic boom, even though a new strain of anti-Semitism is emerging in their old homeland.

Around one million Jews fled during the Soviet era and the post-communist chaos. Those returning now from Israel, the United States and Europe hope to use their new skills and old knowledge to do business.

"Now there are services here, like in New York and Paris, but the lifestyle is more interesting than in either of them -- it's easy to understand why thousands are coming back," said Yevgeny Satanovsky, president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Hard statistics on Jews returning to Russia do not exist, said Satanovsky, but anecdotal evidence is there. He estimates 80,000-120,000 Russian Jews have returned, plus many more who originated in other Soviet republics.

"If you look at industry or banking you'll find thousands of families who have come back," he said.

The Israeli embassy in Moscow estimates around 90,000 of its citizens live in Russia.

"New Russian corporations are now hunting for managers from all over the world who have western experience and a Russian background. These emigrants know the language, the lifestyle, so it's very easy for them to integrate," Satanovsky said.

## GRASSROOTS ANTI-SEMITISM

But the end of the Soviet Union also gave rise to a new phenomenon for Russia's Jews: skinheads and far-right groups who daub swastikas on walls and throw petrol bombs through synagogue windows.

In the 17 years since Soviet rule collapsed, attacks on Russia's Jewish population of around one million and their property have been increasing in both number and severity, say community leaders and human rights organizations.

Last year, they included the vandalizing of a synagogue in the far eastern port of Vladivostok, the spray-painting of "Holocaust 2007" on a Jewish centre in Arctic Murmansk, upturned gravestones in the south and an assault on a visiting Canadian rabbi.

"In Russia there exists 'bytovoi' anti-Semitism, literally meaning everyday or household, which is grassroots anti-Semitism, which is the main problem," Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi and chairman of the European Conference of Rabbis, told Reuters.

"This is attacks on synagogues, spontaneous attacks on cemeteries, etc ... In Russia, we fear the skinheads and neo-Nazis," said Goldschmidt, a native of Switzerland who moved to Russia in 1989.

Anti-Semitism reared its head during Russian presidential election campaigns earlier this year, when dozens of websites and forums appeared saying candidates were Jewish.

The most severe attacks were directed at president-elect Dmitry Medvedev, who was cast as having Jewish roots and therefore unfit to run the country.

Sites used pejorative words to describe him, asked surfers to compare his face to well-known Jewish billionaires and said Medvedev would favor Israeli foreign policy in Russia's dealings with Iran and other Muslim states.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been explicit in his condemnation of anti-Semitism. On a 2005 visit to the Nazi death camp Auschwitz and Polish city Krakow, he said he was "ashamed" of anti-Semitism in his own country.

## XENOPHOBIA

Rights campaigners link the new anti-Semitism to the social turmoil that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"This is a country where the social safety net disappeared overnight," said Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), a U.S. group.

"A lot of young people didn't see a future, and these (neo-Nazi) groups give them a sense of belonging and community in some ways and a structure," he said.

SOVA, a Russian NGO that tracks racist crime, estimates there were 632 racially motivated attacks and 67 murders in Russia in 2007.

Anti-Semitism is just one strand of that: most attacks are on dark-skinned immigrants, many of them Muslims, from ex-Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

"Race-hate violence is increasing in Russia. We have noticed that 50 percent of people in Russia have xenophobic tendencies, and if someone is a nationalist, he will naturally be an anti-Semite," said SOVA's director, Alexander Verkhovsky.

While a law exists against inciting racism, it is rarely applied, say anti-racism groups. Most hate crimes are classified only as "hooliganism" by the authorities, say campaigners.

"What the community would like to see is the full implementation and willingness of state authorities to go after these (skinhead) elements which are a danger," Rabbi Goldschmidt said.

Russian Jews have experienced anti-Semitism for centuries.

Empress Catherine the Great attempted to remove Russia's Jews to the Pale of Settlement, an area on the western fringes of the Russian empire.

In 19th century pogroms Jews were killed, raped and robbed and their villages razed. Many fled westwards.

Later, the Soviet leadership was suspicious of the Jewish community because of its links to a world Jewish movement that was based in the West. In the 1970s and 80s, there was a one million-strong exodus.

## AN UNLIKELY RETURN

Ari Rozichner moved to Israel from Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union, with his parents as a boy in the early 1970s.

"The main difference between my immigration wave and that of the 90s was conceptual," he says, adding that his parents had believed in a Jewish state, while a later generation left "because supermarket shelves were empty".

"Israel has a nice climate -- it's better than winter in Moscow with the black snow," he said.

After working in Israel, the United States and Japan, he has settled in Moscow as an associate vice president of sales with Gilat satellite networks. His clients include state agencies which want to bring the Internet to remote Siberian schools.

"I have one foot here, one foot there. My family is in Israel, it's a different life for them, whereas Moscow is a huge megapolis, the distances are huge, to get by is not easy and life is very expensive," he said.

But "there are more opportunities here, Israel is like a village," he said from his offices in a Moscow suburb.

Apart from the economic transformation, Rozichner says there has been a dramatic change in the official attitude to Jews, who once had a letter 'J' marked in their internal Soviet passports.

"In Russia now, I feel very comfortable as a Jew."

Holocaust Day, January 27, was marked in Moscow schools for the first time this year. Kremlin-friendly Russian billionaire and Jewish European Congress President Moshe Kantor initiated the programme with the Moscow government.

"We are already seeing concrete steps in the right direction," added Rabbi Goldschmidt.

## **#2**

### **U.S. threatens to shut Belarus Embassy**

**By Paul Richter**

**Los Angeles Times, May 2, 2008**

The State Department is considering whether to force Belarus to close its embassy in retaliation for the former Soviet republic's expulsion of 10 U.S. diplomats in an escalating dispute, officials said Thursday.

Officials also were weighing whether to close the U.S. Embassy in Minsk after the ejection of the diplomats this week, which State Department spokesman Tom Casey denounced as "unwarranted and unjustified."

The two countries have been taking steps against each other since Belarusian President Alexander G. Lukashenko's government began jailing protesters after widely criticized elections in March 2006.

The U.S. ambassador departed in March; with the latest steps, there are only four U.S. diplomats in Belarus and six Belarusian diplomats in that country's missions in Washington and New York.

"We are considering the full range of options in terms of our respective diplomatic presences," Casey said, charging that Belarus' actions were "solely as a result of the United States' support for democracy and human rights activists."

"There are probably some other shoes that'll drop in this process," he said.

State Department officials in Washington summoned Belarusian diplomats Thursday to tell them about the steps being considered. A U.S. official in Minsk, Belarus' capital, visited the foreign minister to convey the same message.

"This is not an idle threat," a U.S. diplomat said.

Closure of Belarus' embassy would be a highly unusual step. Lukashenko's government often has been denounced by Americans and Europeans as a Stalinist remnant, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has called the country Europe's last "outpost of tyranny."

Belarus contends that its human rights record is no worse than that of the U.S.

U.S. and European Union officials, who have charged that Lukashenko manipulated the 2006 election to retain power, have banned him and other top officials from entering their countries.

In November, Washington froze the U.S. assets of a large petroleum processing company that is thought to be controlled by Lukashenko.

U.S. officials have said that they would reconsider their stance toward Belarus if the country released jailed opposition leader Alexander Kozulin, who ran against Lukashenko in the last presidential election. Belarus has refused.

Another issue is the confinement of Emanuel Zeltser, a New York lawyer held since March by the government in Minsk on suspicion of using false documents. U.S. officials contend that the reasons for his arrest are unclear and argue that Zeltser, a diabetic, should be released on humanitarian grounds.

## **#3**

### **Protégé in Russia Is Sworn In**

**By C.J. Chivers**

**New York Times, May 7, 2008**

Dmitri A. Medvedev, a soft-spoken lawyer and Kremlin insider who had never held elected office before, was sworn in as Russia's president at noon Wednesday inside the Grand Kremlin Palace.

The ceremony marked the passing of formal power from departing President Vladimir V. Putin to his young protégé, but served equally as an official tribute to the powerful and popular Mr. Putin, who is expected to be confirmed as prime minister on Thursday.

Mr. Putin arrived before Mr. Medvedev and addressed the more than 2,000 guests before the new president took the oath. The remarks appeared to presage Mr. Putin's continued hand on Russian power.

"It is extremely important for everyone together to continue the course that has already been taken and has justified itself," he said.

Mr. Medvedev, in brief remarks after the oath, touched themes he has embraced since Mr. Putin selected him as his successor late last year, including improving living standards, education and medical care and modernizing Russia's narrow economy.

"I would like to assure all of the citizens of this country that I will be working to my fullest capacity," he said. "I fully realize how much has yet to be done."

The Kremlin then plans to crown the occasion on Friday with a triumphant military parade in Red Square of a sort not seen since the cold war years, complete with flyovers of strategic bombers and rumbling columns of tanks.

Mr. Medvedev, 42, is Russia's third post-Soviet president and newest source of speculation. He has presented a puzzling self-portrait, at times suggesting that major changes are necessary — including attacking the country's manifest corruption and reducing the bloat of its bureaucracy — and at other times insisting that he will broadly follow the path chosen by Mr. Putin, his sponsor.

There is no doubt, however, that he is taking charge of a portfolio and a position more difficult than the celebrations will suggest.

The policy challenges are unenviable, even if Russia has recovered from its severely weakened state. Mr. Medvedev faces steeply rising inflation, an outsize bureaucracy, pervasive corruption, a weak judicial system and a population decline fueled by a low birthrate, substandard health care and poor public health.

The economy is narrow and excessively dependent on natural resource wealth, while many sectors — including agriculture and high technology — are underdeveloped. Russia's ruling cliques of bureaucrats, businessmen and former security-service officers, whose loyalties to Mr. Medvedev are untested, have been divided by infighting.

Mr. Medvedev also faces tensions in the Caucasus, along Russia's mountainous southwestern border, where Georgia, a former Kremlin satellite, has accused Russia of beginning to annex the separatist enclave of Abkhazia, and of risking war.

Moreover, Mr. Medvedev, who will appoint Mr. Putin as prime minister as soon as Thursday, will rule through a new governing model and with an uncertain power base. His stature has been undermined even before his inauguration by reports that Mr. Putin intends to continue wielding power from the prime minister's suite.

One Russian newspaper reported this week that Mr. Putin planned to increase the number of deputy prime ministers almost twofold, providing jobs for his entourage and institutionalizing the notion of a strong premier who controls most of the affairs of state.

Stephen Sestanovich, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, said that whatever policy choices Mr. Medvedev ultimately made, the degree to which he would be able to pursue his own vision for Russia's future, as opposed to being confined by Mr. Putin, was not yet clear.

"Does he have any power?" Mr. Sestanovich said. "Is he a decorative figure?"

He added, "Of course, we just don't know about any of that yet."

By many measures, and despite some spectacular setbacks and missteps, Mr. Putin's years of rule were accompanied by a variety of accomplishments, all unforeseen when he stepped from spymaster obscurity eight years ago.

Personal incomes for many Russians rose sharply, Russian troops and their proxies defeated and marginalized the bulk of separatist forces in Chechnya, and the Kremlin paid down foreign debts ahead of schedule.

The value of the Russian stock market skyrocketed. The country's main cities entered construction booms, and urban shops filled with goods. Consumer lifestyles and foreign vacations became available to a large segment of the population for the first time.

Mr. Putin simultaneously played foil to the United States, hosting or meeting national leaders at odds with Washington: Aleksandr G. Lukashenko of Belarus, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Islam A. Karimov of Uzbekistan and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, among others. He reminded his audiences that he had consistently opposed the invasion of Iraq and what he called American interference in the domestic affairs of former Soviet states.

After the economic collapse and public embarrassments that accompanied the administration of President Boris N. Yeltsin, national pride was significantly restored. Many Russians now plan for their futures in ways they could not a decade ago.

But fresh problems have emerged, and problems that thus far have eluded Kremlin solutions remain. Mr. Medvedev, who favors yoga over Mr. Putin's sport of judo, faces several problems that continue to darken projections about Russia's future.

Chief among them, said Anders Aslund, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, in Washington, are inflation, the poor state of public infrastructure and endemic corruption.

During Mr. Putin's first year in office, oil prices were \$20 to \$30 a barrel. Today, oil prices hover around \$120. Russia is the world's largest energy exporter, and the oil price spike accounted for a large part of Russia's economic turnaround.

But the hot economy has created new pressures. The cost of living has soared, pushed upward by a real estate bubble and climbing prices for utilities, gasoline and food.

Inflation has topped 13 percent, spreading dissatisfaction and worry among many Russians, especially pensioners, who remember the inflation of the 1990s. The middle class is pinched, too. This month, gasoline prices reached nearly \$1 a liter, more than \$3.50 a gallon — a considerable expense for a nation with typical household income still a fraction of that in the West.

Several Russian officials have hinted that Russia will soon allow the ruble to strengthen as a means of cooling down the economy. "A main concern is to bring down inflation, and the only way to do it is to let the ruble float upwards," Mr. Aslund said. "I think that Medvedev will get on the strong ruble bandwagon."

Long-term solutions are more challenging. Oil production has begun to decline, and Russia's infrastructure largely dates to Soviet times. The huge investments required to revive both would create more inflationary pressures.

Mr. Aslund said efforts at capital investment risked being squandered by corruption, which is so pervasive that kickbacks on public works and energy projects can reach 50 percent.

"You can't build infrastructure if half the invested money has to go to kickbacks," he said.

Mr. Medvedev, who has made social issues and social stability centerpieces of his public remarks, also assumes the presidency of a nation at risk of a sharp population decline.

Russian public health is poor enough, and the birthrate low enough, that even as Russia has transformed itself, its population has shrunk. Mr. Putin introduced incentives two years ago to encourage women to have more children. In 2007 there was an increase in the birthrate and a small decrease in the death rate.

But Murray Feshbach, a demographer who studies Russian public health, said the demographics still looked bleak, in part because the number of women from 20 to 29 years old — those who in Russia account for most births — would begin to decline in 2012.

The population is also infected with tuberculosis at more than twice the rate considered an epidemic by the World Health Organization. Deaths from AIDS are rising. An outbreak of hepatitis C, which has a long gestation period, is anticipated within five years.

Without comprehensive programs to contain those diseases and reduce the death rate, Dr. Feshbach said, Russia risks a dwindling labor pool and further declines in the size of its armed forces in the decades ahead.

"You have to attack all of these problems simultaneously," Dr. Feshbach said. Otherwise, he added, "the basic thrust is downward and downward."

Mr. Sestanovich said there had been signs in Mr. Medvedev's speeches that he saw the world in ways different from his predecessor. He has called for outside experts to challenge the government's thinking, emphasized the need to shrink the government's size and powers, and challenged the assumption, integral to centralized planners, that the state must produce prosperity.

"He's not just running against the '90s, as Putin did," Mr. Sestanovich said. "There is a kind of awareness in Medvedev that he has to deal with things that went a little wrong under Putin."

He added that some of the tasks Mr. Medvedev had set for himself might be beyond his immediate reach, and that they would provide a means over time to measure his power. "Reeling in the power of the state bureaucracy?" he said. "That's a pretty tall order."

#### **#4**

**Hobbled NGOs wary of Medvedev  
Watchdogs are civil lifeline in lawless Russia  
By Alex Rodriguez  
Chicago Tribune, May 7, 2008**

MOSCOW - Russia's incoming president, Dmitry Medvedev, has called the role of civil society in Russia's future "indispensable." Lyudmila Kuzmina, head of an election watchdog NGO in southwest Russia, will be watching closely to see whether Medvedev's deeds match his words.

Ever since she criticized Russian authorities in a radio appearance last spring, Kuzmina has been accused by police of using pirated software and has seen her computers seized, been blacklisted by the local press and had the electricity shut off in her office building.

"They use all of the resources that they can use to suppress us," Kuzmina said. "It's impossible to compete against them, because the only resource we have is our initiative. They have everything else."

In a country still evolving after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's non-governmental organizations play a vital role as watchdogs in a society where adherence to the rule of law remains weak. And

yet, when Russian President Vladimir Putin steps down from office Wednesday, he will leave behind an NGO community dwindling in both size and influence under his eight years of leadership.

### Fewer NGOs

In the early years of Putin's presidency, there were 650,000 NGOs registered in Russia. Today there are about 277,000. Much of that reduction is the result of a 2-year-old law that allows authorities to shut down NGOs perceived to be a threat to Russia's "sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, unity, cultural heritage or national interests." The law has forced thousands of NGOs on shoestring budgets to hire lawyers to rewrite charters and comply with other mandates.

In a report in February, Human Rights Watch said the law has "clearly narrowed the space for civil society and undermined NGOs' ability to facilitate checks on government conduct. There is little doubt that in practice the law . . . is intended to have a choking effect on civil society."

NGO leaders say Russian authorities pay special attention to NGOs they believe are being funded by the West or those that attempt to highlight the plight of the country's beleaguered opposition movement.

Kuzmina says her troubles began May 10, 2007, when she appeared on Ekho Moskvyy radio to discuss how authorities in Samara, a city on the Volga River, were harassing organizers of a march that was supposed to be led by opposition leader and former chess champion Garry Kasparov.

Kuzmina heads up the regional branch of the Russian election-monitoring group Golos, the Russian word for "voice." Two hours after her radio appearance, Samara police appeared at Golos' office and searched it, Kuzmina says. Two days later police cordoned off the building, saying it posed a fire hazard.

"We had no access to our office, our papers, our phones or belongings until September," Kuzmina said. "We took local authorities to court to regain access, and in September they let us back in."

In mid-September, police returned and began another search. They also visited Kuzmina's neighbors at the apartment building where she lived and questioned them, telling them that the NGO leader drank heavily and often disseminated extremist literature, she says.

Police accused Kuzmina of using pirated software in her office, a charge they later dropped. In the meantime, the Russian agency responsible for monitoring NGOs, the Federal Registration Service, was trying to shut down Kuzmina's NGO on the premise that it could not provide proof of its registration with the agency, Kuzmina says.

The agency pushed ahead with its case despite Kuzmina's explanation that files containing the NGO's legal documents were stored in computers police had seized in the software piracy case. There were hard-copy versions as well, but they were ruined when a water pipe burst while the office was cordoned by police.

On Dec. 29, local authorities employed a new tactic against Kuzmina. They shut off electricity to Golos' building, forcing Kuzmina to operate the NGO out of her second-story apartment. She solved her problems with the Federal Registration Service but she has no employees because the two young women who worked as assistants quit after Samara police repeatedly interrogated them about Golos.

### Steering clear

Local reporters who once relied on her for insight into the fairness of local campaigns and elections now steer clear of her.

"It's become obvious that it's impossible to fight the state," Kuzmina said.

Neither the Federal Registration Service nor Samara police would respond to requests for an interview.

Pavel Chikov, director of an NGO rights advocacy group called Agora, says complaints from NGOs like Golos about government harassment have risen steadily in recent years.

NGO leaders aren't necessarily pinning their hopes on Medvedev, regarded by some as somewhat more liberal-minded than Putin.

"He's not FSB [the successor agency to the KGB], and this is a good thing about him," says Lyudmila Alekseyeva, chairwoman of the Moscow Helsinki Group and Russia's most prominent human-rights activist. "However, the state wants to be as strong as it can be, and this is only possible if civil society is unable to exercise any control over bureaucrats and to learn the truth about what's going on in government. This means the authorities need to stifle civil society so that they can conceal everything they need to conceal."

## **#5**

### **Opposition to Protest Inauguration**

**By Matt Siegel**

**The Moscow Times, May 6, 2008**

Hundreds of opposition activists will stage a protest in central Moscow on Tuesday, defying city authorities on the eve of President-elect Dmitry Medvedev's inauguration, opposition coalition The Other Russia said Monday.

More than 1,000 activists plan to gather at the Chistiye Prudy metro station at 6 p.m. Tuesday and march along the Boulevard Ring to Slavyanskaya Ploshchad to protest Medvedev's inauguration on Wednesday, coalition spokesman Alexander Averin said.

The Other Russia, led by former world chess champion Garry Kasparov and writer Eduard Limonov, founder of the banned National Bolshevik Party, submitted a request to City Hall on April 21 to hold the march.

City Hall rejected the request in an April 29 letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Moscow Times, recommending that the coalition "choose a different location" because another group had already reserved the location.

In recent years, city authorities have rejected several requests by opposition activists to hold protests, often saying that pro-Kremlin youth groups had already been granted the desired locations for rallies.

City Hall spokesman Mikhail Solomentsev told Interfax on Monday that the starting point for the protest had already been reserved by one such group: Young Russia.

Solomentsev accused The Other Russia of "continuing to make provocative statements" and said authorities would take necessary measures to ensure the protest does not go forward.

A woman who answered the phone at City Hall's press office Monday directed all inquiries to the city department responsible for ensuring public order. Repeated calls to the department went unanswered Tuesday.

City police spokesman Yevgeny Gildeyev said senior officers were meeting Monday to discuss police deployments to deal with the unsanctioned demonstration but that no information would be available until Tuesday.

Previous Dissenters' Marches in Moscow have turned violent. On March 3, OMON riot police detained more than 100 protesters who assembled at Chistiye Prudy to protest Medvedev's election — in defiance of a similar City Hall injunction.

Averin said Limonov would participate in the protest. Citing safety concerns, Kasparov declined to confirm his attendance. Kasparov said he had been followed by unidentified individuals in recent days.

Still, Kasparov said, the march would go on as planned despite the ban. "We are going to show off our determination to fight," he said.

Young Russia spokeswoman Yekaterina Fedotova said activists from the pro-Kremlin group planned to hold a rally dedicated to the Victory Day celebrations on Friday.

Fedotova said she could not remember exactly when the group applied for permission for the rally at the site but that she was certain it was before The Other Russia submitted its request.

## **#6**

### **Continuity is theme in Russia inauguration**

**By Grant Slater**

**JTA, May 8, 2008**

MOSCOW -- The inauguration of President Dmitry Medvedev left little doubt that at least temporarily, the new public face of Russia will be little more than cosmetic.

Less than two hours after Medvedev took the oath of office Wednesday on the Russian Constitution, he nominated his predecessor, Vladimir Putin, as prime minister -- a position that will allow the former president to continue to wield significant power in the country.

Before Medvedev's speech, the president-elect trailed Putin through a tightly choreographed ceremony marked by czarist pomp and Hollywood-level production.

Medvedev arrived at the Kremlin in a motorcade, strode through the Kremlin's gilded St. Andrew's Hall and delivered his inauguration speech to some 2,400 assembled dignitaries, including Russia's chief rabbi, Berel Lazar.

Both Medvedev and Putin in their speeches touted Russia's achievements under Putin and promised to continue his policies. But Medvedev also offered a nod to civil freedoms, which have waned in the past eight years.

"I consider it my foremost task to develop civil and economic freedom to create the broadest possibilities for the citizens of our country," Medvedev said in his six-minute address.

The ceremony was heavy on the theme of continuity between Putin and Medvedev. Lazar said that's what he wants in a Medvedev administration.

Lazar rose to his position as chief rabbi of Russia alongside Putin's ascendancy to the presidency, and the head of the Chabad-run Federation of Jewish Communities has grown even closer to Putin during his eight years in office.

Jewish life in Russia largely has become freer and safer, though far less political than before Putin became president.

"During President Putin's time in office, the vast majority of people returned to the belief that tomorrow will be better than today," Lazar said in remarks published on Jewish news Web sites.

At several points during his tenure, Putin spoke against anti-Semitic sentiment on Russian soil. He also built strong ties to the Federation of Jewish Communities, often at the expense of other Jewish umbrella organizations in Russia.

Medvedev, too, has met with Jewish community leaders, most notably attending a Chanukah celebration last year at the federation's main Moscow synagogue. Jewish community leaders expect to continue to have a good relationship with the Kremlin under Medvedev.

Putin's presidency also has seen the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church as a dominant force in Russian society. Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II delivered a sermon and a blessing to Medvedev after his inauguration.

"Russia needs to work out a real balance between the separation of church and state and the fact that a civil society is a place where all social structures are involved," Lazar said.

**#7**

**Mr. Medvedev's Rule: Is Russia's new president serious about ending 'legal nihilism'?**

**Editorial**

**Washington Post, May 8, 2008**

Shortly after being sworn in as Russian president yesterday, Dmitry Medvedev declared that "my most important task is to further develop civil and economic freedoms." Above all, said the 42-year-old former law professor, "we must achieve true respect for the law and end the legal nihilism that is seriously hindering modern development."

That was a remarkable statement under the circumstances. Mr. Medvedev, after all, owes his position to the "legal nihilism" of outgoing president Vladimir Putin, who grossly abused both the letter and the spirit of Russia's nominally democratic constitution to install a handpicked successor. Mr. Putin, who takes over the post of prime minister, accumulated a fortune estimated in the tens of billions while serving two terms as president. In recent weeks he has been twisting the law again to ensure that he will remain Russia's most potent leader.

Chances are that Mr. Medvedev's statement was no more creditable than Mr. Putin's own claim that the presidential transition was carried out "on the basis of strict observance of the laws and the principles of democracy." Still, it's not yet clear what the relationship between the new and old Russian presidents will be -- whether Mr. Medvedev will remain a puppet of Mr. Putin, or begin to assert his own agenda. For that reason, it's worth Western governments taking Mr. Medvedev at his word about his legalistic passion -- and suggesting some ways he might act on it.

To begin, Mr. Medvedev could be asked for action on the 14 unsolved murders of journalists during Mr. Putin's tenure -- such as that of Anna Politkovskaya, in whose case suspects have been identified but never tried. Britain should invite the new president to cooperate in pressing Scotland Yard's charges against a former KGB agent in the assassination of a Putin critic in London.

If that's too hard, Mr. Medvedev at least could end the use of the law as a weapon against opposition leaders, independent civic organizations and human rights groups -- not to mention Russian and foreign businesses whose assets are coveted by the Kremlin and its friends. Tax and environmental inspectors repeatedly found ways in the Putin years to shut down offices or force sales on concessionary terms; several intellectuals who criticized the government were imprisoned on bogus espionage charges. Russia's most successful business executive of the 1990s, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, still languishes in a Siberian prison long after his Yukos oil company was confiscated.

Above all, President Bush and other NATO leaders should ask Mr. Medvedev to begin respecting international law. In Mr. Putin's last months in the presidency, Russia repeatedly violated the sovereignty of its southern neighbor, Georgia, granting recognition to illegal separatist regimes in two of its provinces and dispatching troops to one of them in what has become a dangerous game of brinkmanship. As Mr. Medvedev takes office, Russia is veering toward open confrontation with the West and an entrenched autocracy at home. A shift toward respect for the law would be welcome, indeed.

**#8**

**60th Independence guest list takes shape**

**By Greer Fay Cashman**

**Jerusalem Post, May 1, 2008**

President Shimon Peres did not invite Syrian President Bashar Assad to Facing Tomorrow, the mega-conference he is organizing, which will be held in Jerusalem from May 13-15 in celebration of Israel's 60th anniversary - despite his belief in dialogue with adversaries.

However, several presidents who were invited - most notably US President George W. Bush - have confirmed their attendance.

Like Bush, some of the other dozen presidents on the list have been to Israel before, but this will be a first visit for Mongolian President Nambaryn Enkhbayar, among others.

The agenda for the conference covers a myriad of topics, including the future of the world economy; the content and meaning of a Jewish state; the extent to which Jewish tradition is relevant in tomorrow's world; whether a green Israel is possible; the tipping point of the geopolitical arena; Israel's ability to continue to be a leading contender in the world of science; and cultivating future leaders of Israel and the Jewish people.

Expected presidential attendees include: Victor Yushchenko of Ukraine; Lech Kaczynski of Poland; Paul Kagame of Rwanda; Michael Saakashvili of Georgia; Stjepan Mesic of Croatia; Bamir Topi of Albania; Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso; Danilo Türk of Slovenia, Tommy Remengesau Jr. of Palau; and Valdis Zatlers of Latvia.

The prime ministers of the Slovak Republic and of Hungary, Robert Fico and Ferenc Gyurcsany, will also take part, as will several former world leaders, among them Mikhail Gorbachev, Tony Blair and Henry Kissinger.

As a Nobel Prize winner, Peres thought it important to invite other Nobel Prize laureates, at least seven of whom will be coming to Israel to share their views of the future.

The influx of so many dignitaries will provide logistical challenges for the Foreign Ministry and the tourism industry, as hotels in Jerusalem will be fully occupied.

**#9a**

**Medvedev sends Israel birthday greetings**

**JTA Brief, May 8, 2008**

New Russian President Dmitry Medvedev congratulated Israel on its 60th birthday.

In the message Thursday to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Shimon Peres, Medvedev noted that Russia was one of the first countries to recognize Israel's independence 60 years ago.

"Over the years, Israel has not only achieved serious political results; it has also demonstrated advanced economic, scientific and cultural achievements," Medvedev said in the statement in his second day on the job.

Russia has sought to take on a more extensive role as a member of the diplomatic Quartet that monitors the Middle East peace process, most recently calling for a summit in Moscow this summer. Israeli leaders are skeptical about the idea.

Medvedev says Russia intends to continue an active role in the process, seeking "under international law to provide for the reliable security and prosperity of Israel, living peacefully with all countries and peoples of the region."

**#9b****Ukrainian Jews mark Holocaust at Babi Yar  
JTA Brief, May 7, 2008**

Holocaust survivors and other Ukrainian Jews remembered the Holocaust in Kiev.

A solemn ceremony Monday near the menorah-shaped Holocaust memorial at the site of the Babi Yar massacre, located just outside Kiev, memorialized more than 100,000 Jewish victims. Six torches were lit during the ceremony to honor the memory of the 6 million Jews who were killed by the Nazis during World War II.

The Nazi also murdered thousands of Red Army prisoners of war and resistance fighters at the site.

Participants emphasized the importance of upholding their historic memory, promoting tolerance and accord, as well as respect between representatives of different faiths and ethnic groups. The event culminated in a memorial prayer and the laying of flowers at the memorial.

Commemorative ceremonies were also held in many Ukrainian cities and towns.

**#9c****Russia holding WWII victory parade  
JTA Brief, May 8, 2008**

Russia and its Jewish community are preparing for a military parade to mark its victory in World War II.

Soviet tanks and ballistic missiles rumbled toward the Kremlin in a series of test runs for the celebration through the heart of Moscow. The parade had been on and off for a week.

Friday's parade will mark the high point of celebrations in a week that saw Russia inaugurate a new president, Dmitry Medvedev, and approve its former president, Vladimir Putin, as prime minister.

Jewish community leaders will be on hand for a spectacle not seen since Soviet times, part of two days of remembrance in synagogues and at war monuments across the country.

On Thursday afternoon, Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar and the president of the Kremlin-favored Federation of Jewish Communities, Alexander Boroda, laid a wreath at the memorial to the unknown soldier at the walls of the Kremlin.

Russian synagogues on Friday will offer memorial prayers for Red Army soldiers who died during World War II in Russia's fight against the Axis powers.

"Today, when the forces of evil in the form of global terrorism rise up ... we recall the exploits of Red Army soldiers," Lazar said, the Russian-language Jewish News Agency reported.

**#9d****Ukrainian minister vows to fight hate  
JTA Brief, May 8, 2008**

A Ukraine official in a meeting with the country's U.S. ambassador vowed to fight anti-Semitism.

Ambassador William Taylor and Dr. Aleksandr Sagan, the head of the State Committee of Ukraine on Nationalities and Religions, met Sunday in Kiev to discuss interethnic and interfaith relations in Ukraine, the importance of interethnic education for children, and countering xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

After Taylor expressed concern about anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racial intolerance, Sagan agreed that state authorities are paying insufficient attention to the issues. Sagan said an agreement with the Ministry of Education will establish classes to promote interethnic tolerance for children in kindergartens, schools and institutions of higher education.

Sagan also said the enactment of his bill offering protection to Ukrainian national and ethnic minorities would bring government protection of ethnic minorities nearer international standards.

He said Torah scrolls in the government's hands should be returned to the Jewish community of Ukraine, but the law must be changed to elaborate on the responsibilities of the recipient Jewish organizations.

**#9e**

**Senate Confirms William Burns in State's No. 3 Post  
CQ Today, May 8, 2008**

The Senate Thursday confirmed William J. Burns to be undersecretary of State for political affairs, the State Department's No. 3 job, by voice vote.

In his new job, Burns will oversee the department's regional bureaus as well as bureaus overseeing international organizations and narcotics control. Only Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Secretary John D. Negroponte outrank him.

Burns, a 26-year veteran of the foreign service, is giving up his post as ambassador to Russia, which he has held since 2005.

He replaces Nicholas Burns, who held the job since 2005 and retired from the department at the end of February. Nicholas Burns announced Thursday he would become a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

**#9f**

**Russia: Moscow Expels 2 U.S. Officials; Washington Downplays Move  
RFE/RL, May 9, 2008**

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. government says Russia has expelled two U.S. military attaches. The order follows the expulsion of two Russians from Washington in the past six months.

The Russian Foreign Ministry and Russia's embassy in Washington have both declined to comment on the orders. The U.S. Defense Department also would not speak of the matter. But U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack played down the importance of the expulsions. He said the latest move by Russia was not meant to even the score after the United States expelled one Russian defense official in November, and a second one last month.

"[The Russians] gave us some reasons [for the expulsions]," McCormack said. "We believe that the expulsions were not justified, but as we all know in the world of diplomacy, sometimes these things happen. They happen from time to time."

McCormack declined to say what reasons Russia gave for its expulsion order, adding that Washington doesn't plan any retaliatory measures.

"As far as we're concerned, we don't intend to take any further actions," McCormack said. "Of course, we always reserve the right [to take further action]. But at this point, I don't see that we're going to take any further action in response."

Relations between the two nations have been strained in the past few years. U.S. President George W. Bush began his presidency by declaring his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to be a trustworthy friend. But Bush and Putin -- who stepped down as Russian president on May 7 -- had serious disagreements subsequently. They ranged from the U.S. criticisms of Moscow's human-rights record to U.S. efforts to expand the NATO military alliance by backing membership bids by countries once in Moscow's sphere of influence.

McCormack said the expulsions don't reflect a growing hostility between the two countries, however.

"It's a very substantial relationship in terms of the area that the -- the policy areas that [the relationship] covers. Like I said, these things happen from time to time. Would everybody rather that they not? Of course. But they happen from time to time," McCormack said. "But, as I said, this is a very broad and deep relationship. I think everybody feels as though we are able to do our diplomatic work despite these recent incidents."

## **#9g**

### **Russia Joins New UN Sanctions on Iran VOA News, May 8, 2008**

Russia has adopted new United Nations economic sanctions on Iran aimed at getting Tehran to suspend its nuclear enrichment activities.

The Kremlin announced Thursday that former President Vladimir Putin signed the sanctions into law earlier this week, just before stepping down to be replaced by Dmitri Medvedev.

The U.N. Security Council imposed the sanctions on Iran in early March. They tighten existing sanctions on trade, and on the travel and assets of people involved in Tehran's nuclear and missile programs. They also call for vigilance over banks in Iran.

This is the third set of sanctions the Security Council has imposed on Iran for its refusal to halt uranium enrichment, a process that can be used to make nuclear weapons.

The United States and its Western allies accuse Iran of working to build a nuclear weapon. Iran says its atomic program is for peaceful purposes.

Russia has been helping Iran build its first nuclear power plant. It is located in southwestern Iran on the Gulf Coast.

## **#10**

### **Anti-Semitic attack on Batumi gravesites By Eter Tsotniashvili Messenger Online, May 2, 2008**

Vandals have struck the Jewish cemetery in the seaside town of Batumi, painting swastikas and burning kindling on the gravestones.

Cemetery administrators took the case to the police, but reportedly have no witnesses or suspects.

Israeli Ambassador to Georgia Shabtai Tsur said the incident was unprecedented and won't spoil relations.

"Nothing like this has ever happened during the time our people have lived in Georgia. I believe in the Georgian people, and believe this incident will not change anything in our relationship with Georgians," Tsur told reporters yesterday, adding that he hopes the vandals are caught and punished.

Georgian human rights ombudsman Sozar Subari said it is the first incident of anti-Semitism he can recall in Georgia, and demanded police investigate swiftly and fully.

“If we close our eyes today and don’t pay attention to what has happened, then tomorrow we will have worse problems,” Subari commented after meeting with the Israeli ambassador.

Emil Krupnik, head of the Association of Georgian-Jewish Relations in Batumi, said he was shocked by the anti-Semitic vandalism.

“It is an astonishing incident,” Krupnik said. “I have often heard of anti-Semitic actions in Russia or Ukraine, but I could never imagine the same thing happening on this merciful land.”

He said ethnic Georgian locals were as distraught about the vandalism as the local Jewish community.

35-year-old Imeda Tsitsiashvili is a Georgian Jew, who says the act of desecration will not damage community relations.

“I was born here, I have lots of Georgian friends, but I have never felt [like an outsider]. What happened was anti-Semitism and those people who did it want confrontation between our nations, but I’m sure it will never happen, as we have had a deep friendship for aeons,” he said.

Well-known football commentator Jamlet Khukhashvili, also Jewish, said the incident was a provocation which should be ignored.

Batumi newspaper Batumelebi reported that the vandalism occurred nearly a week ago, but was only now reported.

## **#11**

### **Georgia Is Medvedev's First Foreign Policy Test**

**By Vladimir Frolov**

**Moscow Times, May 5, 2008**

Whether by a calculated design or an unintended chain of events spinning out of control, President-elect Dmitry Medvedev will have a foreign policy crisis on his hands when he officially takes office on Wednesday.

The crisis over Abkhazia and South Ossetia will test Medvedev's leadership in foreign affairs. He will need to make a strong show of force and prove that he can defend Russia's interests and lives no less forcefully than his predecessor did.

The crisis, however, comes at a delicate moment and raises the question of whether it is purposefully intended to narrow Medvedev's field of options when dealing with the West after the inauguration.

In mid-April, right after the NATO summit in Bucharest, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree establishing legal and economic ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The decree also increased Moscow's humanitarian and economic assistance to the breakaway republics.

Although coming short of the formal recognition, the moves signaled that Russia no longer viewed the two territories to be under Georgia's sovereignty.

Georgia protested the move and major Western powers raised their concerns with Moscow. They even tried to reverse the decision in a news release at the United Nations Security Council meeting two weeks ago.

Russia's recent moves in the Caucasus are clearly intended as a veiled threat to dissuade Georgia from accepting NATO membership -- if you join, you will lose Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By the same token, the Kremlin wants to escalate the territorial conflict to dissuade NATO from offering membership in the first place.

Many within NATO already question whether the alliance should rush to assume responsibility for Georgia's security.

The Russian action, however, gives the Georgian leadership an incentive to provoke a Russian military response. This tactic was on display two weeks ago when Georgia deliberately sent a reconnaissance drone into Abkhazia's air space and blamed Russia for shooting it down.

Moscow responded last week by announcing that it was sending additional peacekeeping troops to Abkhazia, a move that prompted U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to register her concerns with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at a meeting in London on Friday.

Before all hell breaks loose, Medvedev will have to apply the brakes to Russian moves in the region, while Washington and Brussels need to dissuade Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili from flirting with war as a tactic to win parliamentary elections on May 21.

## **#12**

### **Georgia, NATO and Mr. Medvedev**

#### **Editorial**

**New York Times, May 6, 2008**

Russia is playing a game of cat-and-mouse with neighboring Georgia that, if everyone is not a lot more careful, could quickly turn deadly.

The Kremlin has never been happy with Georgia's pro-Western preferences and was infuriated by its push for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Because of Moscow's fierce objections, the Atlantic alliance decided last month to postpone membership talks with Georgia. Instead of calming down, Moscow saw that as confirmation that its bullying and threats work — and decided to bully and threaten even more.

First, Russia announced plans to strengthen ties with two pro-Russian breakaway regions in Georgia — Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Last week, it sent hundreds of extra "peacekeepers" to Abkhazia. Russian officials said the troops are needed to protect the province from a Georgian invasion, and it insisted that the contingent would remain within the 3,000-troop limit allowed under a 1994 United Nations-brokered cease-fire. The deployment almost certainly violated the peacekeeping mandate because it was done without Georgia's approval.

Georgia also charged that a Russian MIG-29 fighter jet shot down one of its unmanned reconnaissance drones over Abkhazia. Moscow denied it.

Russia's next president, Dmitri Medvedev, who will be sworn in on Wednesday, needs to move quickly to calm things down. He must tell his aides to cool the rhetoric and begin a high-level dialogue with Georgia. There are questions about whether Mr. Medvedev will be his own man or just a creature of President Vladimir Putin, and this would be a way to prove his independence.

Georgia's leaders must also resist being baited into a fight by Moscow. That will surely doom their dream of NATO membership. They should reconsider their recent threat to block Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization and make a serious effort to lower tensions with Abkhazia by offering economic development and political autonomy. The United Nations Security Council should also consider replacing Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia with genuinely independent troops.

NATO needs to work with both sides to defuse the growing crisis. France and Germany, which argued for putting off Georgia's membership, have a special responsibility. They can start by sending envoys to meet with Mr. Medvedev and make clear that they, and the rest of NATO, are committed to Georgia's security and independence — and will be watching closely to see how he handles this first crisis.

**#13**

## **Warning Shot From Russia?**

**By Anne Applebaum**

**Washington Post, May 6, 2008**

Before it happened, nobody imagined that the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo would set off World War I. Before the "shot heard round the world" was fired, I doubt that 18th-century Concord expected to go down in history as the place where the American Revolution began. Before last weekend, when Itar-Tass declared that the government of Georgia was about to invade Abkhazia, nobody had really thought about Abkhazia at all. As a public service to readers who need a break from the U.S. presidential campaign, this column is therefore devoted to considering the possibility that Abkhazia could become the starting point of a larger war.

Many Americans haven't heard of Abkhazia. It's a pretty safe bet that it's probably not the priority of many people in the White House, either, and it hasn't even been one of those "can you name the general who's in charge of Pakistan" trick questions in the U.S. presidential campaign. On the contrary, Abkhazia ranks right up there with Nagorno-Karabakh, Dagestan, South Ossetia and all the other forgotten Caucasus regions, cities and statelets that no one wants to think about too hard but where, occasionally, something really awful happens.

For the record, Abkhazia is a province of Georgia that declared its independence in 1992. A small war followed, and ethnic cleansing of Georgians from Abkhazia came after that. There have been some UN attempts to make peace, and Georgia has tried offering Abkhazia broad autonomy, but, mostly, Georgia and Abkhazia maintain an uneasy stalemate, which occasionally turns into an extremely uneasy stalemate.

Usually this happens when an atmosphere of extreme uneasiness is useful to Russia, which is Abkhazia's closest military, economic and political ally and has a long-term interest in the destabilization of pro-U.S., pro-Western, pro-NATO Georgia.

Thus, when Itar-Tass announces that Georgia is about to invade Abkhazia, it may mean that Georgia really is about to invade Abkhazia. But it might also mean, as everyone in the region understands, that Russia is about to invade Georgia -- as a "preemptive strike," of course.

Why would the Russians do that? Or even hint that they want to do that? Russian politics having become utterly opaque, it's hard to say. Some think Russia began stirring up trouble in Abkhazia in recent weeks to exact revenge for NATO's recognition of Kosovo -- or perhaps to be able to strike quickly, had NATO decided at its recent summit to offer Georgia a clear path to membership, which U.S. President George W. Bush vocally supported. Others think that recent Russian pronouncements, some of which come close to recognition of Abkhaz independence, are related to the inauguration this week of the new president, Dmitry Medvedev. Maybe Medvedev wants to demonstrate how tough he is, right at the beginning. Or maybe someone else wants to demonstrate how tough Medvedev is, on his behalf. In any case, someone, Abkhaz or Russian, has shot down at least two and maybe four unmanned Georgian military planes in the past six weeks in what looks like a pretty obvious attempt to create a *casus belli*.

It might not work -- and for the moment the Georgians say they have no intention of declaring war. But Georgia holds parliamentary elections this month, under the leadership of a president who might be grateful for a chance to look bold. If the provocation works, or if Russia does invade Georgia -- an emerging democracy, an aspiring NATO ally, a country with troops in Iraq and many implicit assurances of security from Washington and Brussels -- then the West will have to come up with a major response, if not military then political and diplomatic.

The timing couldn't be worse. There are many wonderful things about the U.S. political system, but one of the least wonderful is the amount of energy a presidential campaign sucks out of public life. Between now and January, the current president is a lame duck: Could he make any credible response to a Russian invasion of Abkhazia, should such a thing happen? Is anybody ready to debate a whole new part of the world? Last

weekend, the U.S. media focused unprecedented attention on ... the Guam primary, in which 4,500 people cast ballots and Barack Obama won by seven votes.

Of course, from another perspective, the timing couldn't be better: If you wanted to attack a U.S. ally, or if you just wanted to destabilize and unnerve a U.S. ally, wouldn't this be the perfect moment? Perhaps if the Russians don't take the opportunity, someone else will.

#### **#14**

#### **Georgians 'Very Close' to War Moscow Times, May 7, 2008**

Georgia is "very close" to a war with Russia, a Georgian minister said Tuesday, citing Moscow's decision to send extra troops to the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia.

"We literally have to avert war," Temur Iakobashvili, the minister for reintegration, said at a news briefing during a trip to Brussels.

Asked how close to such a war the situation was, Iakobashvili replied, "Very close, because we know Russians very well."

Russia has said the troop buildup is needed to counter what it says are Georgian plans for an attack on Abkhazia and has accused Tbilisi of trying to suck the West into a war.

Georgian Prime Minister Lado Gurgenedze on Monday rejected Russian allegations that his country wanted conflict with Moscow, saying it was not in Georgia's interest to destabilize its booming economy.

"It's clearly not in our interest to destabilize the situation and disrupt such amazing and rapid economic progress by having hostility on our territory," he said in an interview in Tbilisi.

Meanwhile, officials in Abkhazia on Monday showed off what they say is the wreckage of two unmanned Georgian spy planes that were downed over the weekend.

Georgia has denied that any of its planes were shot down, but Russia -- a longtime backer of Abkhazia -- quickly accused Georgia of inflaming tensions by sending the unmanned planes to spy on Abkhaz forces.

The back-and-forth has fueled fears that full-scale fighting could break out involving Georgia, Abkhazia and the strengthened Russian peacekeeping force deployed along the administrative border separating Georgia and Abkhazia.

In Abkhazia's main city, Sukhumi, a senior Abkhaz defense official, Garry Gupalba, showed reporters Monday what he said was debris from one of the planes, which he said was shot down Sunday by Abkhaz surface-to-air missiles. He said the wreckage showed that the plane was of the same Israeli make as another plane that was downed two weeks ago.

"According to our data, this is an unmanned flying object of the same class" as those that were downed earlier, he said in televised comments.

Footage broadcast on Russian state television showed blackened metal wreckage, some of which appeared to have Russian lettering on it.

Georgia, meanwhile, announced that it was withdrawing from a 1995 agreement that coordinated air defenses among defense ministries in 10 former Soviet republics. The move is expected to have little practical effect, since the two countries have not coordinated air defenses in years.

Still, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov again accused Georgia of purposely exacerbating tensions and planning to use military force in Abkhazia.

Abkhazia and another region, South Ossetia, have had de facto independence since the 1990s, and Moscow's long-standing support for the two regions has long angered Georgia. Russia last week augmented its peacekeeping force in Abkhazia.

Russia opposes Georgia's efforts to draw closer to the United States and NATO, saying membership in the alliance would pose a direct threat to Russia.

The European Union said Monday that it was "seriously concerned" by Russia's decision to send more troops to Abkhazia and establish additional boundary checkpoints.

"The EU calls on all sides to refrain from any steps that could increase tensions and urges the sides to take action to rebuild confidence," the 27-nation bloc said in a statement.

## **#15**

### **Reactions to a New Yeltsin Memorial, as to His Legacy, Are Mixed**

**By Clifford J. Levy**

**New York Times, May 5, 2008**

A memorial to Boris N. Yeltsin was dedicated late last month in a central spot in Russia's most illustrious cemetery, a landscape of earnest tributes to generals and composers, mathematicians and diplomats. The veil was lifted, and there it was: a slab that brought to mind a giant, wobbly, tricolor birthday cake.

Many passers-by do not know what to make of it, which seems fitting, given that it honors a man whose legacy these days remains just as confounding.

Mr. Yeltsin, who died a little over a year ago, is still glorified by some as the founder of a Russia that rose from the debris of the Soviet Union, a visionary who spurned the old order and tried his best to lead his people through troubled times. Others scorn his name, holding his erratic style responsible for the deprivation, lawlessness and anxiety of those early years.

And so it was that when people viewing the monument were asked their impressions of him, they first tended to let out a sigh.

"He did a lot for Russia," said Yekaterina A. Cherpak, 63, a teacher. "He gave new life to it. We all know what the 1990s were like. Naturally, things are better now. Was it Yeltsin's fault? You can never say that it was only Yeltsin, Yeltsin alone. He began everything, and beginnings are tough."

This dissonance was exemplified at the dedication of the Yeltsin memorial, in Novodevichy Cemetery on April 23, the anniversary of his death.

When President Vladimir V. Putin spoke, it was hard to ignore his own tortuous relationship with his mentor. Mr. Yeltsin essentially created Mr. Putin, plucking him from back-room obscurity in St. Petersburg and promoting him to head of the security forces and prime minister before resigning and relinquishing the presidency to him.

Yet, in substance and style, Mr. Putin has repudiated Mr. Yeltsin. Mr. Putin's political movement in recent years has been grounded in the fundamental message that he saved Russia from the ravages of the Yeltsin tenure. Mr. Putin presents himself as sober, wiry, acerbic and always in command. Mr. Yeltsin had the image of a bombastic backslapper who was not particularly inclined to say no to a drink.

Some of Mr. Yeltsin's admirers say Mr. Putin has turned his back on the pluralistic democracy that Mr. Yeltsin was seeking to build. Mr. Putin's backers have a ready retort: The Yeltsin years sowed instability, and a strong hand in the Kremlin was needed to steady the country.

At the ceremony at Novodevichy, Mr. Putin spoke loftily of his predecessor while hinting at the contrast between them.

"His road as a politician and a citizen was not easy," Mr. Putin said. "More than once in his life he was faced with difficult choices, choices of principle. But his road was every bit as unique as was our country's destiny, the destiny of a country that went through unprecedented transformation and difficult upheavals, but held firm to its statehood and to its right to free and independent development."

Mr. Putin was at the ceremony with Dmitri A. Medvedev, whom Mr. Putin chose as his successor as president, and their presence together seemed to highlight another contrast. Mr. Yeltsin left the Kremlin abruptly and under a cloud, while Mr. Putin is ending his term at the height of his powers. After Mr. Medvedev's inauguration on Wednesday, Mr. Putin intends to become prime minister.

The Yeltsin sculpture is supposed to represent the tricolor Russian flag, which Mr. Yeltsin introduced. The memorial has little in common with others in the cemetery, which often feature chiseled portraits or busts, as well as traditional touches.

Though many famous Russians are buried at Novodevichy — from the playwright Anton Chekhov to the aircraft designer Andrei N. Tupolev — the only other national leader there is Nikita S. Khrushchev, the former Soviet general secretary. Other party general secretaries are buried at the Kremlin, but Khrushchev had been stripped of his post before he died.

Like Mr. Yeltsin, Khrushchev was in some sense a reformer who ended up shunted aside and discredited.

Mr. Yeltsin's family was at the ceremony and approved of the design of the memorial, which was created by the sculptor Georgy Frangulyan.

"This is a portraiture piece, but one that is solved by different means," Mr. Frangulyan said on Russian television. "The shape itself expresses his spirit, and even the outward appearance is crazily resembling him — crazily resembling him. You will see it yourself."

Visitors to Novodevichy last week, however, were not always enchanted by the monument.

"It's horrible, just horrible," said Anastasia Kandaurova, 21, a paramedic.

Then again, she was also hostile toward Mr. Yeltsin. Like many young people, she knew more of the crises at the end of his presidency, including the financial collapse of 1998, than of his earlier heroics, like leading the fight against the coup that temporarily overthrew the last Soviet president, Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

"I believe that he did nothing good for the country, especially at the end of his time," Ms. Kandaurova said of Mr. Yeltsin. "Everything was terrible, salaries, everything. It was not only him, it was the people around him. Putin, of course, is much better."

Another visitor, Vasily Dardonov, 67, was bothered by the imagery. "It looks like they threw the flag down on the ground," Mr. Dardonov said. "It's like an insult. Do you like it if your American flag lies on the ground? Do you walk on it or near it?"

Nina Antonova, a retired doctor, found the memorial puzzling, but took some solace in the knowledge that it pleased Mr. Yeltsin's wife, Naina. Ms. Antonova said she wanted to see the memorial because she continued to think fondly of Mr. Yeltsin.

"I voted for him, and I personally believed in him," she said. "He managed to overcome a lot, to make a break with the past. But in the end, things didn't turn out so well."

## #16

### **Iran Issues Cause Senators to Balk at U.S.-Russia Civilian Nuclear Pact**

**By Adam Graham-Silverman**

**CQ Today, May 6, 2008**

A bipartisan group of senators is lining up congressional opposition to a civilian nuclear agreement signed Tuesday between the United States and Russia, citing Moscow's involvement in nuclear activities in Iran.

The deal would allow broader nuclear cooperation between the two former adversaries, allowing U.S. nuclear companies access to the Russian market and the transfer of nuclear materials between the two countries. The White House contends that Russia's supply of nuclear fuel to Iran removes the need for Tehran to enrich its own.

"Russia's agreement to deliver nuclear fuel and take back spent fuel from Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr is a welcome step that provides Iran a civil nuclear power capability without the need for the indigenous enrichment of uranium or reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel," the United States and Russia said in a joint declaration April 6.

But a letter to President Bush circulated by Sens. Norm Coleman, a Minnesota Republican, and Evan Bayh, an Indiana Democrat, cites Russian opposition to U.N. sanctions against Iran, nuclear fuel exports to the Bushehr reactor and Russia's "increasingly abrasive foreign policy" as reasons to oppose the deal.

"Mr. President, we firmly believe that the finalization of [the] agreement with Russia at this time could severely undermine our policy with respect to Iran at a critical juncture," the letter reads. The senators plan to send the letter Wednesday.

#### Veto-Proof Support Needed

Congressional opponents of the deal say they will have the votes to block it or render it ineffective. Congress can block the pact by enacting a joint resolution of disapproval within 90 days of submission to Congress, but such a resolution would be subject to a presidential veto and thus would require a two-thirds majority of both chambers to succeed.

Opponents of the deal say that broad Iran sanctions bills (S 970, HR 1400) with language that would block agreements with Russia have veto-proof support. The Senate bill has 70 cosponsors, and the House passed its legislation, 397-16, on Sept. 25.

Neither measure has seen Senate action, however.

"Unless the Russian government demonstrates it will play a constructive role in ensuring that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon, I am not prepared to support an advanced nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia," Coleman said.

The administration may submit the deal to Congress as soon as next week.

The senators' letter calls on Bush to withhold submission of the deal until Russia ends support for Iranian weapons and nuclear fuel programs.

"Russia must also first demonstrate that it is prepared to cooperate with us to increase meaningful economic pressure on Iran to end its defiance of the U.N. Security Council's mandatory resolutions to suspend its enrichment of uranium," they wrote.

Russia started shipping fuel to the nuclear reactor at Bushehr after the December release of a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that found that Iran had shelved its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

The reactor could provide enough fuel for 35 nuclear weapons annually, according to the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, though Iran would face a difficult task in extracting plutonium from the uranium used there.

**#17**

## **McCain Would Evict Medvedev From G-8, Push Russia on Democracy**

**By Ken Fireman**

**Bloomberg, May 6, 2008**

President George W. Bush said in 2001 that he had looked Russian leader Vladimir Putin in the eye and "was able to get a sense of his soul." Senator John McCain says he looked into Putin's eyes "and saw three letters: KGB."

McCain, 71, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, favors expelling Russia from the Group of Eight club of industrial powers. He calls for forging a "League of Democracies" to confront Putin and hand-picked successor Dmitry Medvedev, who takes over tomorrow, on Russian threats against former Soviet republics and rollbacks of domestic freedoms.

The candidate's approach to Russia signals that he has aligned himself with hard-line foreign-policy advisers who favor democracy promotion above all and rejects advocates of doing business with authoritarian regimes when it suits U.S. interests.

McCain's aggressive policy may encounter difficulties because the U.S. needs support from Russia, a nuclear power, on critical issues such as containing Iran. Russia's economy, enriched by oil exports, also is less vulnerable to outside pressure than at the start of Bush's presidency.

"McCain is going to be dealing with an ascendant Russia," said Robert McFarlane, national security adviser under President Ronald Reagan. By contrast, Reagan "benefited from dealing with a Soviet Union that was pretty much in decline."

Eyes 'Turned Back'

Russians are aware that McCain's rhetoric is harsher than that of the Democratic presidential candidates, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Medvedev said Feb. 26 that he wanted to work with a "modern" U.S. leader rather than one "whose eyes are turned back to the past."

McCain's turn toward those who favor confronting Russia has left "realist" supporters such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger out in the cold for now, said Dimitri Simes, who heads the Washington-based Nixon Center, a foreign-policy research institution.

"While McCain has a lot of prominent, distinguished realists who support him, have access to him and remain friends with him, none of them imply that they have real influence on him at this point," Simes said in an interview.

Nonetheless, Kissinger and McFarlane suggest the Arizonan may temper his views on Russia once in the White House.

"I am sure that Senator McCain will over time state a fuller view of his convictions," Kissinger said last month on Bloomberg Television's "Political Capital with Al Hunt."

Challenging Russia

McFarlane said a McCain administration will be dominated at first by "neocon redux" advisers who favor challenging Russia at every turn. He predicts such a policy will founder on the reefs of Russia's rising economic power.

"For the first year you're going to see, very likely, disagreement, public sniping" between McCain and Russian leaders, McFarlane said at an April 28 forum at Simes's center. "If there's good news, it is that in the second year all those youngsters will get fired and maybe we'll settle down to a more really realistic presidency."

The candidate's chief foreign policy adviser, Randy Scheunemann, said McCain means what he said -- and that he is the true realist. Challenging Russian leaders' misconduct is the only practical way to change their behavior, Scheunemann said in an interview.

"The Russians have made a very cold calculation of what their interests are," said Scheunemann. "They will pursue those interests until they understand that there will be some cost to them."

Obama, Clinton

Both Obama, 46, of Illinois, and Clinton, 60, of New York, oppose as counterproductive, as does Bush, the expulsion of Russia from the annual G-8 summit.

"Our response is, help us understand how kicking them out of the G-8 is going to help the democratic activists inside Russia," Obama's main Russia adviser, Stanford University scholar Michael McFaul, said in an interview.

Obama believes the U.S. can do business with Russia on arms control and counter-terrorism "and talk with them about democracy at the same time," McFaul said.

Clinton, like McCain, has mocked Bush's "soul" comment about Putin. "He was a KGB agent," she said on Jan. 7. "By definition, he doesn't have a soul." Her comments about Russia have been more critical than Bush's, without providing specifics on tougher policy proposals.

In a March 2 statement greeting Medvedev's election, Clinton said she would test his stated desire for a new start in relations with "eyes wide open," working together on joint concerns such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation while clarifying "what America's priorities are and that we will stand up for them."

NATO Inclusion

While all three candidates back the eventual inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, they differ over another sore point with Russia, a U.S. plan for a missile-defense system in Europe. McCain supports the plan as protection from Iranian ballistic missiles; Clinton and Obama say Bush is rushing to deploy unproven technology.

Given this political landscape, most Russian leaders prefer an Obama presidency, if only because he has avoided McCain's and Clinton's Putin-bashing, said Alexei Pushkov, a Russian foreign-policy analyst and television commentator.

"The best was Obama; he didn't say anything," Pushov said.

**#18**

**Seeking more freedom, Russians and others in region flock to Ukraine**

**By Maria Danilova**

**Associated Press, May 9, 2008**

KIEV - A gloomy Vladimir Putin wears a Czarist crown, clutching a bag full of dollars and a miniature television tower.

Filipp Pishchik says this and similar cartoons, depicting the former president as a corrupt leader who stifles free speech, got him in trouble with authorities and forced him to leave Moscow last year for neighboring Ukraine.

"Ukraine is just great," said Pishchik, 37, a designer and architect. "Here there is hope."

Since the 2004 Orange Revolution ushered in a vigorous, sometimes chaotic democracy, Ukraine has become an island of freedom and tolerance in an ex-Soviet bloc still dominated by authoritarian regimes, and journalists, political activists, artists, and business professionals have flocked here.

In Soviet times, a dissident wanting to live free had only the West to look to. Getting there was hard, the culture alien, the language foreign. Ukraine, however, is an easy visa-free destination for most, Russian is spoken and speech is free.

Rights groups complain that Ukraine is stingy with granting asylum, which guarantees the applicant's right to stay and work indefinitely. Still, the influx vividly illustrates how far the country's path has diverged from that of Russia, which by the time of the Orange Revolution had already begun rolling back democratic reform.

The number of foreigners registered as living in this country of 46 million doubled to nearly 200,000 from 2003 to 2006, according to United Nations statistics; that does not include the unregistered. The number applying for political asylum rose to 2,300 last year from 1,800 in 2005.

Pishchik said he moved here after architecture magazines stopped publishing his work, longtime clients left him - hinting they were forced to do so by authorities - and he got threats from security officials. The reason, he says, was the cartoons he displayed in galleries and on Web sites.

Today, he lives in a spacious Kiev house loaded with exciting new projects and is married to a Ukrainian artist.

"I tell all my friends that they all will end up here one day," Pishchik says.

Similar stories abound in today's Ukraine.

Yuriy Svirko, a 33-year-old journalist from Belarus, decided he had had enough of President Alexander Lukashenko's iron-fisted rule after he was accused of attacking a presidential body guard and threatened with arrest. (He says it was the guard who attacked him.)

Svirko arrived in Kiev right after the Orange mass movement overturned a fraudulent election and brought reformist Viktor Yushchenko to the presidency.

Ukraine today is awash in competitive elections, noisy street protests and heated debates on TV shows and occasional fist fights in Parliament. Opposition rallies are held under the windows of the president's office, and many have forgotten a time when TV channels were state-controlled.

Savik Shuster had a TV political talk show in Russia until it was closed in 2004 as the Kremlin tightened the screws on media. Now he's in Kiev, hosting a similar program on a Ukrainian channel.

"In Ukraine, freedom of speech still exists," said Shuster, 55. But for Russia today, "openness is like light for a vampire."

During the past two years, Belarusian expatriates have held an annual "Belarusian Spring" festival, featuring fare banned back home - movies, poetry readings, underground rock bands.

This year's festival kicked off with a dozen activists racing down Kiev's main avenue on cross-country skis when snow was nowhere to be seen. It was a poke at Lukashenko, a winter-sports fan who every year makes government officials and professional athletes compete with him in a ski competition which he always wins.

But rights groups say that while Ukraine is good at welcoming professionals, it is still inhospitable to relatively unskilled political refugees, granting only 3 percent of applications for political asylum, compared with more than 30 percent in neighboring Poland.

Ulugbek Zainabudinov, an Uzbek opposition activist, fled to Russia after a bloody crackdown on an uprising in his country. But Russian authorities began arresting the refugees at the Uzbek government's request, so in 2006 he moved to Ukraine.

That year, Ukraine deported 11 other refugees back to Uzbekistan, drawing harsh criticism from human rights groups. All the deportees have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms, the groups say.

"The very idea of freedom exists here and it is developing," said Zainabudinov said. "But I don't feel safe."

His asylum application has been turned down, and fearing deportation, he is seeking refugee status in Western Europe.

Experts say Ukraine has neither the resources nor the political will to take care of asylum-seekers. Natalia Prokopchuk of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said Ukraine also does a poor job of helping asylum-seekers while their cases are being considered.

Natalia Naumenko, spokeswoman for the State Department on Migration, counters that most applicants are illegal migrants caught en route to Western Europe.

Dmytro Groisman of the Vinnytsia Rights Groups said the influx of asylum-seekers does not prove that Ukraine has developed into a tolerant and democratic society. Instead, he said, refugees simply had nowhere else to go.

"When your apartment is on fire, you would jump anywhere - in the snow, in the water, from the 6th floor," Groisman said. "People are running where they can."

Olga Kudrina, 22, is one of the lucky few who received political asylum. Sentenced to prison for unfurling a Putin-must-go banner near the Kremlin, she fled to Ukraine and lives with her baby daughter in a tiny apartment in Vinnytsia, 160 miles, or 257 kilometers, southwest of Kiev.

Two colleagues from her banned National Bolshevik Party share her apartment in Vinnytsia and are seeking asylum.

One of them, Mikhail Gangan, 22, came here to escape arrest for breaking into a government building in Moscow and demanding that Putin step down.

"You live calmer, better here," said Gangan. "You won't see as many cops on the streets - you can walk down a street and not see a single one. In Russia that cannot happen."