



WASHINGTON, D.C. September 12, 2008

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: Update on Russia-Georgia Conflict

Dear Friend,

The post-mortem review of the Russian-Georgian conflict is in full swing in Washington, D.C. This week, Congress held a series of hearings on the U.S. role during the war, the state of U.S.-Russia relations, NATO enlargement and how Russia's actions impact its other neighbors in the region. We have included two summaries of these hearings and a number of stories focusing on the current Russia-Georgia situation.

Relief efforts continue to aid displaced populations in both Georgia and its disputed territories. If you would like to support these efforts, please go to <http://ujc.org/page.aspx?id=182008>.

A small step was taken to improve U.S.-Belarus relations this week. The U.S. government removed some economic and travel sanctions, which were in effect due to continuing human rights violations in Belarus. Tensions peaked after Belarus recalled its ambassador to the U.S. and demanded that the U.S. Ambassador in Minsk leave the country. (See the attached story.) Earlier this year, NCSJ visited Minsk and met with Jewish community leaders there.

Finally, yesterday the nation commemorated the seventh anniversary of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Emotional tributes were held in Washington, D.C., New York City, Western Pennsylvania and other parts of the country. I was gratified to see partisan politics put aside for one day, to remember the brave men and women who died while trying to protect others and to mourn all those who lost their lives. Having dedicated much of my professional life to fighting tyranny and oppression, it was one more reason I am proud to be a citizen of the United States of America.

Sincerely,

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

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. September 12, 2008

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#1

Bush cancels civilian nuclear deal with Russia

By Jennifer Loven

AP, September 8, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration has canceled a once-celebrated civilian nuclear cooperation deal with Russia.

The State Department announced Washington's pointed but mostly symbolic expression of displeasure with Moscow on Monday in a briefing with reporters.

The move combines with a recently announced \$1 billion foreign aid package for tiny Georgia and the time Vice President Dick Cheney spent last week railing against Russia throughout its backyard to form the U.S. administration's punishment of Moscow for its invasion of Georgia last month. The nuclear deal was highly unlikely to win approval on Capitol Hill this year anyway, but President Bush decided to actively withdraw it to make a loud statement.

The deal for extensive and unprecedented cooperation between the two nations was sent to Congress for approval in May, capping two years of tough negotiations.

#2

US lifts some Belarus sanctions

BBC News, September 5, 2008

The US has lifted some of its sanctions on the authoritarian regime in Belarus, officials in Minsk have announced.

The move came after Belarussian authorities freed a number of detainees the US regarded as political prisoners.

The bulk of US sanctions against Minsk remain though, and the two sides do not have full diplomatic ties after ambassadors were withdrawn in March.

The sanctions were meant to highlight the poor rights record of President Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

'Right direction'

The US is one of his fiercest critics, and Washington banned US firms from dealing with state-controlled oil and chemical company, Belneftekhim, in November 2007.

Travel restrictions were also imposed on the president and his inner-circle by the US and the EU.

Earlier this year, US sanctions were widened to take in subsidiaries of Belneftekhim - including Lakokraska and Polotsk Steklovolokno.

But officials at the US embassy in Minsk say measures against these two firms will be suspended for six months.

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Popov hailed the decision as a "step in the right direction".

"This move by the US administration is also in the interests of the US business community," he said in a statement.

The US announcement followed the release of all prisoners regarded as political by the West.

They included Alexander Kozulin, who was sentenced to more than five years in prison in 2006 for organising protests after President Lukashenko was re-elected for a third term.

Analysts believe the president - often branded Europe's last dictator by his critics - may be courting the West in response to his souring relations with Moscow.

#3

Turkish, Armenian Presidents Express Hope After Historic Meeting In Yerevan RFE/RL, September 6, 2008

Turkish President Abdullah Gul has met with his Armenian counterpart as part of a historic visit to Yerevan that could mark the start of a new phase in diplomatic relations between the traditionally bitter neighbors.

Gul was invited by Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian to watch an international football match between their national teams, with an extended closed-door session before the two leaders headed across town for the World Cup qualifier.

The Turkish team went on to win the match, 2-0.

Two deeply felt issues have long separated Armenians and Turks. The first are the mass killings of ethnic Armenians around World War I, which Armenia and some other countries call genocide; anyone referring to them that way in Turkey faces criminal prosecution. The other issue is Armenia's support of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, where Ankara accuses Armenia of occupying part of the territory of one of Turkey's closest allies. Armenia says it is helping its ethnic kinsmen defend themselves.

The visit offered the rarest of opportunities for a review of bilateral ties, something that made it more than a symbolic gesture. The two states do not have diplomatic relations.

Gul is the first Turkish head of state to visit Armenia since it became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Reuters quoted Gul aboard the plane en route to Armenia as praising Sarkisian for his "brave" decision to invite him to the game. Gul was booed and hissed by fans when he entered the stadium for the evening match.

Gaining Momentum?

The initiative has virtually assured a second landmark event, since at the end of their private meeting, Gul invited Sarkisian to the next match between their national teams in Turkey.

Speaking at a joint press conference after the talks, Gul said, "I hope that this visit will create the possibility to improve bilateral relations."

Sarkisian declared that there is now the "political will to decide the questions between our countries, so that these problems are not passed on to the next generation."

Speaking ahead of his eagerly anticipated arrival in Yerevan, Gul had said he hoped the match would help lift the barriers dividing two people "who share a common history and will contribute to regional friendship and peace."

RFE/RL Armenian Service correspondent Ruzanna Stepanian said hundreds of supporters of the Armenian Revolution Federation party -- a member of the governing coalition -- greeted Gul's motorcade from Yerevan

airport with placards reading "No to genocide" and "Accept the truth." The party continued its protest with a candlelight vigil near the stadium where the two teams square off, at a memorial to the Armenian victims of the mass killings early last century.

A major opposition alliance headed by ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian endorsed Sarkisian's initiative and chided the Armenian Revolution Federation party's protest as "illogical," given its participation in the government. Ter-Petrossian's bloc postponed a major political rally it had planned for September 5, citing the historic nature of the Turkish visit.

The "Turkish Daily News" quoted diplomatic sources as saying the agenda of the meeting between Gul and Sarkisian would include bilateral relations and Ankara's proposal to set up a joint committee of historians to study the massacre of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Wider Goals

Analysts say Yerevan's hope is that a thaw would lead to a permanent reopening of the Turkish-Armenian border, which has been closed for 15 years.

Ankara's interest in a detente is seen as part of a larger Turkish strategy of stabilizing relations with its bordering states, including Greece, Syria, Iraq, and now Armenia.

"My president's visit to Yerevan...is going to be an important step to open doors for dialogue with Armenia," Foreign Minister Ali Babacan told Reuters.

The overture came quickly on the heels of Russia's cross-border military operations to back separatists in Georgia and Moscow's subsequent recognition of their independence, a situation that Babacan has described as "alarming."

Babacan said the war between Russia and Georgia dislodged a series of frozen conflicts in the Caucasus, raising risks of further instability but also creating opportunities for new diplomatic efforts to resolve them.

"The current circumstances, we believe, are conducive for such a bold step [as the bilateral visit]," Babacan said in an interview late on September 5 in Avignon, France, where he was attending a meeting of EU foreign ministers.

Babacan said the fighting in neighboring Georgia "showed we need to come up with a fresh approach to resolution of conflict in the Caucasus."

The minister rejected Turkish opposition criticism of the rapprochement with Armenia, saying it was time for "more open views."

#4

'EU should condition any agreement with Ukraine with fighting anti-Semitism' European Jewish Press, September 8, 2008

BRUSSELS - A Jewish group has urged the European Union to condition any agreement aimed at deepening its relations with Ukraine with practical measures against constantly increasing anti-Semitism in this country. Ahead of an EU-Ukraine summit meeting in Paris, France, the Rabbinical Centre of Europe (RCE), a Brussels-based organization assisting more than 600 rabbis across Europe, stressed on Monday that in contrast to most European countries affected with various degrees of anti-Semitic incidents, "in Ukraine these incidents have become a matter of routine."

"Ukraine is a country in which anti-Semitic declarations are voiced frequently, this assuming part of the national revival of a country that shamelessly makes Jews a target of anti-Semitic affronts," the RCE said.

The rabbinical organization called upon the leaders of the European Union, including French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who heads the EU Council, "to condition the partnership of Ukraine with the EU with the eradication of anti-Semitism in this country and with taking immediate and practical measures to carry this out."

The RCE added: "This ought to be included with the other conditions placed by the European Union for the inclusion of Ukraine in the organization. It is unheard of that a country where anti-Semitism is almost official may be considered a partner to the Western block."

At the EU-Ukraine summit, the EU will be represented by President Sarkozy, European Commission president Jose-Manuel Barroso and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana. The Ukrainian delegation will be led by President Victor Yushchenko.

The RCE also called upon the prerequisite of "illegitimizing anti-Semitism as a permanent condition for the admission of any country to the EU."

he group has ordered a report issued by the Tel Aviv University's Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism covering the anti-Semitic incidents which occurred in Ukraine throughout 2008.

Earlier this year, the Council of Europe in Strasbourg issued a report expressing concern about growing racially motivated attacks in Ukraine and especially about attacks against rabbis and Jewish students, as well as the vandalism of synagogues, cemeteries and cultural centres.

Around 180,000 Jews live today in Ukraine.

#5

Cheney Warns Russia to Reverse Its Course

By Steven Lee Myers

New York Times, September 7, 2008

CERNOBBIO, Italy — Vice President Dick Cheney on Saturday denounced Russia's war against Georgia as evidence of a pattern of "troublesome and unhelpful actions" that threatened peace from Central Asia to the Middle East to Europe.

Mr. Cheney, speaking at an international conference here beside Lake Como, said that Russia now faced a choice between cooperation and isolation, and he urged European nations to join the United States in unambiguously supporting Georgia, Ukraine and other new democracies in Russia's shadow.

"Does Russia really want to separate itself from the community of values that has fueled so much of its own economic progress?" Mr. Cheney asked an annual gathering of political leaders and business executives organized by the European House-Ambrosetti, a private consultancy. "Does the Russian government really wish to operate in the modern world as an outsider, alienating free countries and trying to rally the world's dictatorships?"

European leaders have uniformly criticized Russia's attack in Georgia and its recognition of two separatist regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but no clear agreement over how to respond has emerged.

Mr. Cheney, who visited Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine this week to express American support, offered no new proposals either, but he described the conflict as a new test for NATO that required a unified response.

In Moscow, Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, defiantly dismissed criticism like Mr. Cheney's during remarks to security aides, mocking the inability of the international community to press Russia.

"Russia is a state that from now on must be reckoned with," Mr. Medvedev said. Then he added a message clearly directed toward critics in the United States and Europe:

“They are trying to put political pressure on us. We, of course, will not simply accept this situation. But they will not be able to do anything. And I would like to state as clearly as possible that this confrontation was not our choice.”

Mr. Cheney has long been the Bush administration’s most vocal hawk, but his remarks on Saturday, originally intended to reflect broadly on Euro-Atlantic security, amounted to a sweeping indictment of Russia’s actions in recent years and a challenge to its leaders to reverse course. The speech, his aides said, was carefully vetted in Washington and reflected the administration’s deep anger over Russia’s incursion into Georgia a month ago.

He called for a continued expansion of the alliance to include Georgia and Ukraine, despite Russian threats, and a diversification of energy supplies, which, he said, Russia has wielded like a weapon to intimidate European nations.

Mr. Cheney noted Russia’s reduction of oil to the Czech Republic after it agreed to build a missile defense radar station and also a Russian suggestion that Poland would be making itself a target if it agreed to deploy missile interceptors. He also cited threats and economic pressure directed against Ukraine and the Baltic states. “That is no way for a responsible power to conduct itself,” he said.

He warned that Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, if not reversed, could lead to new divisions and conflicts on Europe’s eastern borders.

“We know that if one country is allowed to unilaterally redraw the borders of another, it will happen and it will happen again,” he said.

#6

U.S. Rules Out Unilateral Steps Against Russia

By Thom Shanker and Steven Lee Myers

New York Times, September 8, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration, after considerable internal debate, has decided not to take direct punitive action against Russia for its conflict with Georgia, concluding that it has little leverage if it acts unilaterally and that it would be better off pressing for a chorus of international criticism to be led by Europe.

In recent interviews, senior administration officials said the White House had concluded that American punishments like economic sanctions or blocking Russia from world trade groups would only backfire, deepening Russia’s intransigence and allowing the Kremlin to narrow the regional and global implications of its invasion of Georgia to an old-fashioned Washington-Moscow dispute.

Even as they vowed to work with allies, administration officials conceded that they wished the European Union had been willing to take firmer action than issuing tepid statements criticizing Russia’s conduct. But the officials said the benefits of remaining part of a united front made it prudent for the United States to accept the softer approach advocated by Italy and Germany, among other allies.

Some within the administration have argued for a more hawkish response, saying that Moscow probably intends to impose its will among independent states along its borders. They say the Kremlin is signaling to Ukraine, the Baltic nations and Poland that it is back in the game of regional hegemony, and they say it must be deterred.

In the first days of the conflict, for example, Vice President Dick Cheney reflected the view of administration hard-liners who saw Russia’s offensive as justifying their skepticism and a policy that the Kremlin’s actions would “not go unanswered.” In his more recent comments, Mr. Cheney has stuck with the administration’s emerging position of a more calibrated response.

In an interview, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates described the administration as having come to a unified position that calls for “a long-term strategic approach — not one where we react tactically in a way that has negative strategic consequences.”

Mr. Gates, a career Kremlinologist and former director of central intelligence, said: “We are all agreed that we need to stay very much in close collaboration with the Europeans and others. I think there is a sense that we do have the time to calibrate reactions carefully. And I think there is agreement not to take any precipitous actions. But there is also agreement on the importance of continued support for Georgia’s territorial integrity.”

He cautioned that “if we act too precipitously, we could be the ones who are isolated.”

As part of the new strategy, President Bush notified Congress on Monday that, “in view of recent actions” by Russia, he was withdrawing from consideration an agreement for civilian nuclear cooperation that he and Vladimir V. Putin, then Russia’s president and now the prime minister, negotiated in April after years of effort. While the step was the most meaningful show of displeasure the United States has made over Russia’s military action in Georgia, it also reflected a more cautious response.

The deal was all but certain to die in Congress anyway, and the agreement could be revived by the administration should Russia’s behavior improve, officials said.

The issue of how to manage Russia is also playing into presidential politics. Senator John McCain, the Republican nominee, has long called for excluding Russia from the Group of 8 industrialized powers and has urged a firmer response. Senator Barack Obama, the Democratic nominee, has criticized the Kremlin’s decision to go into Georgia but has made it clear that he favors more engagement.

While the United States has been cautious in moving to punish Russia, it has thrown significant support behind Georgia, including a \$1 billion economic assistance package that Mr. Bush proposed last week. The aid, officials said, was to shore up Georgia’s economy and to help the political standing of President Mikheil Saakashvili, the republic’s battered leader.

Overall, the administration’s strategy reflects a desire to defend Georgia’s territorial sovereignty and its symbolic role as an emerging democracy, while not precluding cooperation with Russia on a number of important long-term national security interests, including counterterrorism, nonproliferation and efforts to halt narcotics traffic.

While the United States and Russia continue to share a number of national security interests, Mr. Gates said, “We would still like to see Russia headed toward a more constructively collaborative role in dealing with international problems — rather than throwing their food on the floor.”

In other interviews, a range of senior administration officials argued that Russia is already paying a price for its actions, as foreign investors appeared to be removing or withholding assets, prompting a decline in the ruble since the Kremlin’s forces crossed into Georgia. The Russian stock market has also plummeted.

“Russia has been condemned by the European Union, by the Group of 7 foreign ministers and individually by many other countries,” said a senior State Department official, who, like some others interviewed for this article, was given anonymity to discuss internal administration thinking.

“This is very strong stuff, and they do feel that,” the official added. “And even if they didn’t feel that, they might feel the billions of dollars of capital that has fled. The Russians are on a course of self-isolation. Nothing we do in a deliberate, punitive way would be as effective in isolating Russia as what they have done themselves.”

Regarding another possible punishment, a veto of Russian entry into the World Trade Organization, the more likely decision now is for a disciplined silence from powerful voices in Washington that had supported Moscow’s membership, other officials said. A renewal of support for membership in the organization would be dependent on Russian behavior.

"We were an advocate for Russia, but maybe we just go quiet," Mr. Gates said in describing the emerging strategy. "So it's not a negative decision. Where we were their advocate, maybe we're not so much their advocate anymore, at least not for the foreseeable future."

The United States has left much of the direct diplomacy to Europe, including the administration's endorsement of a leading role by Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president and current president of the European Union, who visited Moscow on Monday to urge Russia to abide by the terms of a cease-fire he brokered last month.

Inside the Bush administration, cabinet-level meetings of principal policy makers have been held several times since the fighting in Georgia began on Aug. 7. The most recent took place just before Mr. Cheney visited the region last week.

The vice president, who visited Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine, all former Soviet republics on Russia's periphery, spoke forcefully on Russia for much of last week, but even he did not close the door on improved relations, casting future relations as a choice for Russian leaders to make.

"What we do know right now is that Russia's leaders cannot have things both ways," Mr. Cheney said on Saturday at an international forum in Cernobbio, Italy. "They cannot presume to gather up all the benefits of commerce, consultation and global prestige while engaging in brute force, threats or other forms of intimidation against sovereign, democratic countries. To succeed and prosper in the modern world, Russia must relate to the world as a responsible modern power."

In Rome on Monday, where the vice president was meeting with Italian officials, a senior administration official said, "The emphasis that the United States wants to make going forward is to make certain that we've got everybody knitted up together in terms of developing a common policy that we can all support."

#7

**Russian nuclear warship in Venezuela manoeuvres: officials
AFP, September 8, 2008**

MOSCOW — Russia said Monday it was dispatching a nuclear cruiser and other warships and planes to the Caribbean for joint exercises with Venezuela, the first such manoeuvres in the US vicinity since the Cold War.

The announcement came amid soaring tensions between Russia and the United States, including over the presence of US naval vessels sent close to Russian shores to deliver aid to Georgia, but Washington downplayed its significance.

In a statement, a spokesman for the Russian navy said the joint manoeuvres would take place in November under an agreement sealed when the leaders of the two countries met in Moscow in July.

Among the Russian ships to take part in the exercises would be the heavy nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser Peter the Great, a vessel with massive firepower whose cruise missiles can deliver nuclear or conventional warheads.

Foreign ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said the Admiral Chabanenko, Russia's most modern anti-submarine destroyer, would also join the exercises, along with an unspecified number of anti-submarine naval aircraft.

He said the exercise had been planned for some time and was "not in any way connected to the current situation in the Caucasus," where Russian forces last month fought a brief war with US-ally Georgia.

"It is not aimed at any third country," he said.

The announcement of the manoeuvres however came as tensions between the United States and Russia remained high and after Moscow questioned the use of US warships to deliver humanitarian aid to Georgia following the conflict.

Asked what he thought about the US naval presence near where the Russian Black Sea fleet is based, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said earlier this month that Moscow would definitely respond, with "calm."

In Washington, the White House, which has sharply criticised Russia over its actions in Georgia and which also has an openly antagonistic relationship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, shrugged off word of the manoeuvres.

"We've seen the reports and we'll see how the exercise goes," US National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe said.

The Pentagon also said it was not concerned.

"We exercise all around the globe and have joint exercises with countries all over the world. So do many other nations," said Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman.

In its statement, the Russian navy said the joint manoeuvres with Venezuelan ships would include exercises in sea search and rescue as well as communications training, and would also have an unspecified aviation component.

The Venezuelan navy announced Saturday that four Russian ships with almost 1,000 sailors aboard would carry out joint manoeuvres with the navy of Caracas' leftist government in Venezuelan territorial waters on November 10-14.

The Peter the Great cruiser is one of what NATO refers to as "Kirov Class" heavy missile cruise ships, the world's largest naval cruisers.

The ship is armed with the Granit long-range anti-ship missile system, which is known in the West as the Shipwreck missile. It also has a sophisticated air defence missile system capable of striking both air and surface targets.

#8

Russia Agrees to Limited Pullout From Georgia By Ellen Barry and Dan Bilefsky New York Times, September 9, 2008

MOSCOW — After a tense four-hour meeting with President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, announced Monday that Russia agreed to withdraw its troops by mid-October from its positions in Georgia outside the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

He also agreed to allow 200 observers from the European Union to monitor the conflict, a step that Russia had resisted. But Mr. Medvedev said Russia would stand by its decision to recognize the two breakaway regions as independent nations.

"We have made our choice," he said at a joint news conference afterward. "This is a final and irreversible choice. This is an irrevocable decision."

Mr. Medvedev's comments were greeted defiantly by the Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili, in Tbilisi, where Mr. Sarkozy brought the agreement later on Monday.

Mr. Saakashvili offered cautious approval of the deal but openly questioned whether Moscow could be trusted, saying he had received written assurances from the European Union that it would protect Georgia's territorial integrity.

"There is no way Georgia will ever give up a piece of its sovereignty, a piece of its territory," he said. "Of course they should get the hell out of the territories they control."

Mr. Sarkozy's grueling day underlined the challenge facing European mediators as they try to bring the two sides together. The conflict has become a test for the European Union's ambition to become a major foreign policy player on a par with the United States, and a personal credibility test for the French president, who currently holds the bloc's rotating presidency.

Mr. Sarkozy's task is harder because the European Union has been bitterly divided over how to manage its relationship with Russia. Some member nations, like France, have struggled to safeguard Europe's economic interests in Russia, while formerly Communist countries like Poland want the bloc to punish Russia for failing to uphold human rights and respect democratic norms.

At times, Mr. Sarkozy's frustration showed — as when a reporter in Moscow asked if he had allowed Russia to alter Georgia's borders.

"It was not up to Russia to define Georgia's borders or frontiers," he said. "The Russians will say what they wish to say."

The conflict began Aug. 7, when Georgia attacked the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and Russian troops poured across the border in response. More than a month later, Russian troops continue to occupy Georgian territory outside the enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia despite a cease-fire agreement that called on both sides to withdraw troops to their positions before the fighting broke out.

Throughout the crisis, Russia has excoriated the American role in the region, but welcomed intervention by the European Union. As he stood beside Mr. Sarkozy, praising the Europeans as "our natural partners, our key partners," Mr. Medvedev claimed that the United States was responsible for the attacks on Tskhinvali.

Georgia, he said, "received the blessing of one government. I can't say how it was given, whether through direct instruction or tacit approval. But there is no doubt that it happened."

He continued: "They launched an idiotic escapade. People were killed. And now all of Georgia is paying for it."

If implemented, the agreement will go a long way toward reconciling outstanding conflicts from the original cease-fire agreement reached on Aug. 12. The roughly 200 European Union observers, working with monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, would replace Russian peacekeepers in the security zone outside the two enclaves and in other disputed areas, so that Russian troops would pull back.

The agreement also requires Russia to withdraw five peacekeeping posts in the west of Georgia, between the cities of Poti and Senaki, within seven days. In return, Georgia is required to withdraw its forces to their bases by Oct. 1. Mr. Medvedev also said he had received a written commitment by Georgia, backed by France and the European Union, that it would not use force on the enclaves.

In an interview after a news conference in Tbilisi, Mr. Saakashvili said he had refused to sign a document pledging not to use force because that matter was covered in the cease-fire deal of Aug. 12.

Monday's agreement — and, in particular, Russian cooperation with Mr. Sarkozy — could have an impact among European leaders, said Tomas Valasek, a foreign policy specialist at the Center for European Reform, a research group in London.

"Those within Europe who have argued for nonconfrontation and against isolating Russia, like Germany, will now feel justified," he said. "They will say engagement works."

The decision came a day before European officials were due to meet in France for discussions, to be attended by President Viktor A. Yushchenko of Ukraine, on whether to offer Ukraine the possibility of future membership in the European Union, a move that Russia opposes. Monday's announcement makes Ukraine's case less likely to move forward, Mr. Valasek said.

Russia plans to establish formal diplomatic relations with governments in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, the Abkhaz and South Ossetian capitals, on Tuesday. Two weeks after Mr. Medvedev announced the decision to formally recognize them, Nicaragua has followed suit.

Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, said Monday that the Belorussian Parliament might take up the matter after elections this month.

At the news conference, Mr. Medvedev said he was certain that over time, other governments would come to accept the new borders.

"We realize everything changes in this world, including recognition or nonrecognition of this or that state," he said. "This is a reality that should be taken into account by our European partners."

"If our colleagues are ready to do it right here and right now," he added, "we wouldn't be opposed to it."

Meanwhile, Georgia and Russia carried their dispute over the breakaway enclaves to the International Court of Justice in The Hague on Monday, as three days of hearings began over Georgia's request for an injunction ordering Russia to stop "terrorizing" ethnic Georgians and to allow refugees to return to their homes.

Georgia's first deputy minister of justice, Tina Bujaliani, said her country was urgently turning to the court, the United Nations' highest, "at a time of great distress in its history, a time when hundreds of thousands of its nationals are persecuted and displaced from their homes only because they are Georgians."

Russia, as expected, challenged the court's jurisdiction and asked it to dismiss the Georgian application.

#9

Belarus, Kyrgyzstan 'Among World's Top Reformers'

by Charles Recknagel

RFE/RL, September 10, 2008

Four countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are among the world's top economic reformers, according to a new World Bank survey.

The bank's report, "Doing Business 2009," praised Azerbaijan, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus for streamlining procedures for opening and operating businesses.

The annual survey looked at the time and costs required for starting and maintaining a business in different parts of the world.

The progress can only be welcome news for local businesspeople across the postcommunist world, which is famous for burdensome bureaucracies, interminable licensing processes, and complicated tax codes.

Among the report's findings:

* Belarus created a "one-stop shop" for property registration and computerized its records. As a result, the time required to register property in Minsk fell from 231 days to 21.

* Corporate income-tax rates in Albania were cut in half this year, to just 10 percent

* The cost to start a business in Azerbaijan is equivalent to 3.2 percent of per capita income. That compares to 27.6 percent in Tajikistan.

* And while the number of procedures required for getting construction permits is 13 in Kyrgyzstan, the number in Russia remains 54.

The four countries are the leaders among 28 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia that this year trimmed regulations, boosted property rights, and widened access to credit -- all things that the World Bank sees as essential to stimulating economies.

But are such reforms enough to attract greater foreign investment, the other big stimulus for economic growth?

There, the picture is less clear. While the report congratulates the reformers, it also notes that the survey does not reflect such factors as macroeconomic policy, infrastructure, currency volatility, investor perceptions, or crime rates.

Attention-Grabbing

Nicolas Redman, an expert on Eastern Europe and Central Asia at the Economist Intelligence Unit in London, says that countries that do well in reports like these do attract the attention of investors. But he says investors consider a good ranking in such surveys to be just one of many things to be weighed before making any decisions.

"Generally it is something that would improve the atmospherics around an investment decision. It might make businesses look at the country more seriously. The World Bank is actually quite candid about the limitations of [its survey] so I don't think on the basis of a high index ranking anybody is really going to invest in a country purely on that basis," Redman says.

"But it is a useful thing for countries to have and a lot of countries have taken their ranking seriously because it is a positive signal and it might at least encourage potential investors to have more of a look at the country. So, it is a way of, I suppose, of attracting attention rather than sealing a deal, if we can use that phrase."

Redman says that what investors are really interested in is a country's whole business environment. That includes not just what laws are written to cover business dealings but, more importantly, how courts implement those laws.

Equally, he says, foreign investors are very interested in such factors as the stability of the economy overall and its levels of corruption and inflation. And, finally, there is market size.

"If you are an investor who is looking to sell into a country, as distinct say from exporting, whether a manufactured item or raw material from a country, then market size is going to be a very important thing," he says. "Some of the smaller countries such as Azerbaijan and Georgia which have been top of the rankings recently are perhaps at a disadvantage compared to someone like, say, Russia or even Ukraine or Turkey. They are just much smaller markets and the capacity to sell soap or any other commodity there is obviously going to be much more reduced."

Redman says this means that countries that make an effort to reform their business laws and streamline their procedures probably should not expect to get an immediate payoff in foreign investment. But at least they can know they are on the right track.

"Governments that care about these sort of things are perhaps more likely than the average to care about other aspects of the business environment," Redman says. "So, again, it becomes a good signal, or at least a comforting or an interesting signal for investors."

The "Doing Business 2009" survey ranks countries based on 10 indicators that measure the time and cost of government requirements in starting, operating, and closing a business, trading across borders, and paying taxes.

#10

New Memorial to Honor Holocaust Victims in Belarus Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, September 10, 2008

BOBRUISK, Belarus — This week in the capital of Belarus, the Minsk Sculpture Plant has begun work on preparing the memorial to victims of the Bobruisk ghetto. According to the chairman of the Jewish community of Bobruisk, Leonid Rubinshtein, the detailed work on the sculpture will resemble a defeated city as a symbol of the many broken human lives.

With the fundamental preparation of the stone achieved, workers have already begun to work on the text that will be written on a granite slab. It will read "Prisoners of the Bobruisk Ghetto. July-November 1941. You loved life" on the left side, while the right side will display an excerpt from the Torah: "May your souls be intertwined with the eternal unit of life".

The concept behind erecting this commemorative monument was put forward by Leonid Rubenshtein and immediately received moral backing by his fellow community members. The sculpture fulfilling the work is Maxim Petrul according to the design of Galina Levina.

The memorial will stand on the site of the former Bobruisk ghetto on Bakharova Street (formerly named Shosseiniy). The project is expected to be completed by the end of September or early October of this year, with its inauguration slated to take place in October. It is timed to coincide with the 65-year anniversary of the ghetto's liquidation, the ultimate death of its Jewish residents.

The Jewish community of Bobruisk is a member of the Association of Jewish Communities of Belarus, an affiliate of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS.

#11

Russia's Next Target Could Be Ukraine By Leon Aron Wall Street Journal, September 10, 2008

Perhaps the most urgent question in the world affairs today is whether Russia's invasion and continuing occupation of Georgia was a singular event. Or was it the onset of a distinct, and profoundly disturbing, national security and foreign policy agenda?

Much as one would like to cling to the former theory, the evidence favors the latter. A European delegation led by French President Nicolas Sarkozy did manage this week to get assurances that Russian troops would withdraw from Georgia (excepting Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose independence Moscow says is "irrevocable"). But ultimately, this short war is likely to be remembered as the beginning of a decisive shift in Russia's national priorities. The most compelling of these new priorities today seems to be recovery of the assets lost in the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, which Vladimir Putin has called the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

How does Russia achieve this goal? By dominating the domestic politics and, more importantly, economic- and foreign-policy orientation, of the former Soviet republics. Anything considered antithetical to Russia's interests, as interpreted by the current Kremlin leadership, must be discarded -- be it democratization, oil and gas exports that bypass Russia, and, especially, the membership in the Western organizations such as the European Union and NATO. And if, in the process, Russia must sacrifice most or even all of the fruits of the post-Soviet rapprochement with the West -- including membership in the G-8, entry to the World Trade Organization or ties to the EU -- so be it.

Russia's "targets of opportunity" include simmering border disputes (and virtually all Russia's borders with newly independent states could be disputed, since they are but the very badly demarcated internal borders of the Soviet Union), and the presence of the ethnic Russian or Russian-speaking minorities in neighboring countries.

Apart from Estonia and Latvia -- where ethnic Russians constitute over a quarter of the population, but where NATO membership raises the risk for the Kremlin -- by far the most likely target is Ukraine. Kiev has repeatedly defied and angered Russia by the domestic politics of democratization, a decidedly pro-Western orientation, and the eagerness of its leadership to join NATO. Nearly one in five Ukraine citizens are ethnically Russian (a total of almost eight million) and live mostly in the country's northeast, adjacent to the Russian border.

Mr. Putin has made his contempt for Ukrainian sovereignty clear, most notably at the NATO summit in Bucharest last April when, according to numerous reports in the Russian and Ukrainian press, he told President Bush that the Ukraine is "not even a real state," that much of its territory was "given away" by Russia, and that it would "cease to exist as a state" if it dared join NATO. Clearly, Vice President Cheney's trip to Ukraine this past weekend, where he expressed America's "deep commitment" to this "democratic nation" and its "right" to join NATO, was intended as a message to Moscow.

Still, there is no better place to cause a political crisis in Ukraine and force a change in the country's leadership, already locked in a bitter internecine struggle, than the Crimean peninsula. It was wrestled by Catherine the Great from the Ottoman Turks at the end of the 18th century. Less than a quarter of the Crimeans are ethnic Ukrainians, while Russians make up over half the inhabitants (the pro-Ukrainian Crimean Tatars, one-fifth).

Ever since the 1997 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Russia and Ukraine, signed by President Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, a solid majority of the Russian parliament has opposed the recognition of the Crimea as Ukrainian territory. Russian nationalists have been especially adamant about the city of Sevastopol, the base for Russia's Black Sea fleet and the site of some of the most spectacular feats of Russian military valor and sacrifice in World War II and the Crimean War of 1854-55.

Nationalist politicians, including Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, have repeatedly traveled to Crimea to show the flag and support the Russian irredentists -- many of them retired Russian military officers who periodically mount raucous demonstrations. In 2006, their protests forced the cancellation of the joint Ukraine-NATO Sea Breeze military exercises. Sevastopol was and should again be a Russian city," Mr. Luzhkov declared this past May, and the Moscow City Hall has appropriated \$34 million for "the support of compatriots abroad" over the next three years. On Sept. 5, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Vladimir Ogrzyzko accused the Russian consulate in the Crimean capital of Simferopol of distributing Russian passports to the inhabitants of the peninsula.

With almost three-quarters of Sevastopol's 340,000 residents ethnically Russian, and 14,000 Russian Navy personnel already "on the inside" (they've been known to don civilian clothes and participate in demonstrations by Russian Crimean irredentists), an early morning operation in which the Ukrainian mayor and officials are deposed and arrested and the Russian flag hoisted over the city should not be especially hard to accomplish. Once established, Russian sovereignty over Sevastopol would be impossible to reverse without a large-scale war, which Ukraine will be most reluctant to initiate and its Western supporters would strongly discourage.

A potentially bolder (and likely bloodier) scenario might involve a provocation by the Moscow-funded, and perhaps armed, Russian nationalists (or the Russian special forces, spetsnaz, posing as irredentists). They could declare Russian sovereignty over a smaller city (Alushta, Evpatoria, Anapa) or a stretch of inland territory. In response, Ukrainian armed forces based in the Crimea outside Sevastopol would likely counterattack. The ensuing bloodshed would provide Moscow with the interventionist excuse of protecting its compatriots -- this time, unlike in South Ossetia, ethnic Russians.

Whatever the operational specifics, the Russian political barometer seems to augur storms ahead.

#12

Reports: Russian repeats warning on missile sites

By Mike Eckel

AP, September 10, 2008

MOSCOW - The commander of Russia's strategic missile forces has repeated warnings that Russian ballistic rockets could be aimed at U.S. missile defenses in Europe if the system is ever built, news agencies reported Wednesday.

Col. Gen. Nikolai Solovtsov spoke a day before Russia's foreign minister visits Poland, which has agreed to allow U.S. missile interceptors on its territory.

"I cannot rule out that, in case the top military-political leadership makes such a decision, both the missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic and other similar facilities in the future could be designated as targets for our ICBMs," Solovtsov was quoted by ITAR-Tass and Interfax as saying.

Poland and the United States reached a deal last month on building the site for 10 U.S. missile interceptors by 2012. Observers said the conclusion of the deal, clinched after months of protracted negotiations, was prompted by Russia's war last month with Georgia, which had alarmed former Soviet bloc countries and others neighboring Russia.

The United States has said the defenses are meant to protect Europe and America from attacks from Iran.

But Russian officials have said repeatedly that they consider the site a threat and have threatened to attack Poland _ a NATO member _ possibly even with nuclear weapons.

"These 10 interceptor missiles cannot significantly devalue (Russia's) attack potential, although this will certainly make some negative effect on it. But the point is that the United States doesn't want to take on any legal obligations but is only asserting verbally: we aren't threatening you," Solovtsov was quoted by Interfax as saying.

"They already promised in words when they unified Germany that not a single NATO soldier would be there. And where are they now?" he was quoted as saying.

Foreign Ministry Sergey Lavrov was to go to Poland on Wednesday for talks with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and others.

In an interview published Wednesday in the Polska daily, Lavrov said Washington had destabilized the military balance between Russia and the United States and he said Poland, and its decision to host missile defense, had become "an element of a very dangerous game."

"This means that Poland took revenge on us for having defended the Ossetians," he was quoted as saying. "This was a mean action and a political mistake."

"Unfortunately, the Europeans are following voices from outside the continent and are pursuing a policy that is in conflict with European mentality. That's a shame," he said.

#13

Russia urged to halt arms to Iran, Syria

By Nicholas Kralev

Washington Times, September 10, 2008

Israel's envoy to the United States urged Russia on Tuesday not to sell advanced weapons to Iran and Syria despite Moscow's anger over Israeli military cooperation with Georgia.

Ambassador Sallai Meridor also said that the main reason his government began indirect talks with Syria earlier this year was to "bring about a strategic repositioning" in the region by breaking up Damascus' alliance with Iran.

Israel has developed close military relations with Georgia, supplying about \$300 million in weapons last year, according to the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv. It is trying to juggle that support with its campaign against Iran's nuclear program, which Israel regards as its main strategic threat.

Russia, which invaded Georgia last month in response to a Georgian attack on an enclave bordering Russia, has been furious about the aid to Georgia and suggested that Israel cannot expect Moscow to show restraint with Iran and Syria if the relationship continues.

Mr. Meridor said Russian arms sales to Israel's adversaries were far more dangerous.

"Were Russia to continue to supply lethal, sophisticated arms to Syria, this would be destabilizing and dangerous for Israel and for peace in the region," Mr. Meridor told editors and reporters at The Washington Times. "We hope that they will not do that."

He referred to the so-called S-125, also known as SA-3 Goa, a low-altitude surface-to-air missile system designed to track and destroy targets such as aircraft, helicopters and cruise missiles.

Defense experts suspect that Russia has sold the system to both Iran and Syria and expect more sales in the future.

"We hope that, despite the events in Georgia, the Russians will not supply Iran with arms," Mr. Meridor said. "I hope the Russians know better. ... I don't see why anybody would perceive our relationship with Georgia to be in any way threatening or destabilizing."

Moscow, which still has some troops in Georgian territory, has a different view.

"Russia is against any military aid to Georgia and would like to see that country demilitarized," said Evgeny Khorisko, spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Washington.

Israeli officials said they are reviewing requests from Georgia for new arms systems. They insisted that the weapons would be only for defensive purposes and said that Israel has vetoed orders for tanks. Israel has been reluctant to share its most advanced systems with Georgia for fear that the weapons could fall into Russian hands.

According to media reports, however, Israel has provided the Georgians with sophisticated unmanned surveillance drones, rockets and equipment to modernize combat aircraft.

Georgian Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili is a former Israeli citizen.

Russian arms sales to Iran and Syria have also been extensive.

According to an article by military analyst Nikita Petrov, published by Russia's RIA Novosti news agency, "Syria owes Russia \$3 billion for weapons supplied to it, and this on top of Damascus' \$10 billion debt for armaments sold in Soviet times, which Moscow forgave, incidentally, for a pledge to spend another \$2 billion on arms purchases from Russia."

A senior U.S. defense official said Tuesday that Washington does not expect Iran to receive a Russian air-defense system this year.

"To the best of my knowledge, I don't believe we think the missiles referred to ... are in fact slated for delivery by the end of this year," Eric Edelman, undersecretary of defense for policy, told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Mr. Meridor said that any new arms sales to Israel's enemies would increase the threat from "two unprecedented terror bases supported by Iran and Syria" - the militant Palestinian group Hamas in the south and Lebanon's Hezbollah in the north.

"We have today our country covered from both sides by something that may be nearing altogether 50,000 rockets and missiles," he said.

In an effort to reduce the threat, Israel began indirect talks last year with Syria in Turkey.

In the most direct and frank public discussion by a senior Israeli official of the Jewish state's rationale for talking to the Syrians, the ambassador said that a "U-turn" in Syria's alliance with Iran is a "litmus test" for reaching a broad peace agreement.

"There can't be true peace if Syria continues to align with the Iranian regime and with terror groups," such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, Mr. Meridor said.

The ambassador said repeatedly that the prospect of Iran building a nuclear weapon is the most serious threat in the Middle East today. "The window of opportunity" to deter that threat "is narrowing but not yet closed," he added.

Three rounds of U.N. sanctions on Tehran so far are "not enough," Mr. Meridor said. He called on European companies to cut the supply of refined petroleum products to Iran to put more pressure on the regime.

Asked whether Israel might attack Iran's nuclear sites, the ambassador said his country's "clear preference is for this to be resolved through peaceful means." He pointedly refused to criticize Democratic presidential nominee Sen. Barack Obama's stated intention to meet with Iranian leaders if elected.

#14

Moscow Will Keep Troops in Georgia Enclaves

By Stephen Castle

New York Times, September 10, 2008

PARIS — The regional power struggle prompted by the crisis in Georgia intensified Tuesday when Moscow said it would keep thousands of Russian troops in the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the European Union promised deeper ties with Ukraine.

At a meeting with President Nicolas Sarkozy of France on Monday, President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia agreed to honor a European Union-brokered peace plan requiring Russia to withdraw troops from positions within Georgia by mid-October. Russian troops in the two breakaway enclaves were not covered by the agreement, European Union officials said.

Russia said it pulled troops back from a town outside Abkhazia on Tuesday, one of 24 Russian positions in Georgia.

Defense Minister Anatoly E. Serdyukov told Mr. Medvedev during a televised meeting on Tuesday that about 3,800 troops would remain in each breakaway region. Georgian officials estimate that there were about 2,200 Russian troops in each enclave before fighting erupted on Aug. 7.

Meanwhile, the European Union said it was on track to sign a deal in 2009 to strengthen economic and political ties to the government in Kiev, although it gave no commitment that Ukraine would ever become a member.

European Union and Ukrainian officials met in Paris on Tuesday to negotiate an "association agreement" that could be signed next year. The deal would create a free trade zone and increase cooperation on energy, among other measures.

"This shuts no doors and perhaps it opens some doors," Mr. Sarkozy said.

#15

Russia: Were Religious Organizations Wrongly De-registered?

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18, September 10, 2008

In the wake of stringent bureaucratic demands introduced under former President Vladimir Putin, hundreds of religious organisations across Russia have been dissolved in recent years, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Most are seemingly defunct or indifferent to losing their legal personality status. But some - who believe they were wrongly deregistered, including for offering religious education - are battling to keep it.

Some 800 Russian religious organisations were dissolved in 2007, one of Russia's senior religious affairs officials, Andrei Sebentsov, told Forum 18 on 8 September. Normally the Justice Ministry would provide up-to-date figures, he suggested, but current re-organisation there means they will be unavailable for some months.

Reports of liquidations hail from various regions. In Tyumen Region (approximately 2,000km or 1,250 miles east of Moscow), courts dissolved 25 Muslim, several Protestant, one Catholic and one Orthodox religious organisation in 2007, Russian Islamic affairs website Islam.ru reported on 27 November 2007.

In Orenburg Region (approximately 1,400km or 875 miles south-east of Moscow), Muslim organisations are also being dissolved due to tighter state controls, local Mufti Abdulbary Khairullin reported in early 2008. And while businesses can afford a fine of 10,000 Roubles (2,223 Norwegian Kroner, 276 Euros or 391 US Dollars) for failing to file tax returns, "this is a significant sum for us," he remarked on Islam.ru website.

In Moscow, nine religious educational organisations are slated for liquidation in 2008, the Federal Registration Service (FRS) announced on 12 March.

In Chuvashia Republic (approximately 1,000km or 625 miles east of Moscow), three Pentecostal religious organisations have been dissolved in recent years, an FRS department spokesperson told Forum 18 in November 2007.

Created within the Justice Ministry in 2004, the FRS was charged with registering and dissolving religious organisations. It was also allocated wide monitoring powers, such as to send its representatives to any meeting held by a religious organisation. Religious organisations have since complained about the body's pedantic and intrusive approach. The traditionally Buddhist Tuva Republic (4,000km or 2,500 miles south-east of Moscow), tried to dissolve a Pentecostal church in 2005, for example, because it failed to report a change of address and a pastor's visit to a neighbouring church was not stipulated in its registered charter activity.

A 14 July 2008 presidential decree abolishing the FRS transfers its powers back to the Justice Ministry. Andrei Sarychev's department still deals with registration of religious organisations, he told Forum 18 on 2 September. He was unable to say who is now in charge of dissolving them, however.

Religious organisations' fears increased following the January 2006 adoption of the so-called NGO Law, billed as a means of preventing foreign states from financing political opposition initiatives. This introduced a probing accounts procedure for non-commercial organisations which the mass of local religious communities, particularly Orthodox parishes, would have found challenging. In response to sustained lobbying by religious leaders, the government markedly simplified the new rules for religious organisations in April 2007, and extended the first deadline for submissions to 1 June 2007.

Failure to file even these accounts turns out to be a common reason for liquidation, however. "In the villages they can't retain a bookkeeper to deal with accounting," Mufti Abdulbary Khairullin, whose Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Directorate is affiliated to Talgat Tadhuddin's Ufa-based muftiate, explained to Forum 18 on 2 September. Five of his communities were dissolved as a result, he confirmed. "But it's not a problem - it's even convenient, as they can still meet but don't have to file any accounts." In practice, the five communities' new status of unregistered group has not affected their activity, he said.

Under the 1997 Religion Law, religious groups (as opposed to registered religious organisations) are permitted only to meet on premises provided by their members and teach existing followers, but this is not generally policed.

Mufti Galimzyan Bikmulin of Tyumen Muslim Spiritual Directorate - affiliated to Ravil Gainutdin's Council of Muftis - told a similar tale.

"In the villages they don't have the expertise to submit accounts," he told Forum 18 on 2 September. "And there wasn't the same level of accounting earlier." Twelve Muslim organisations in the Directorate have lost legal personality status for not submitting accounts, said Bikmulin, but their activity has not been hindered as a result.

A Baptist church in Tyumen Region which "didn't do anything at all on paper" was dissolved last year, Pastor Sergei Lavrenov of Light to the World Pentecostal Church told Forum 18 from Tyumen on 2 September. It has since managed to re-register, however, he added. Lavrenov doubted that the liquidations in his region were "oppression or some kind of attack. Many are defunct, and there's one rule for everyone; mosques and Orthodox parishes were liquidated too." A lawyer, he believes the state's new, stricter approach is correct: "There are pastors who don't want to pay taxes or file any accounts to the state - but they are accountable for public donations."

On 29 May 2008 Krasnodar Regional Arbitration Court declared unlawful a local tax inspectorate's March 2007 decision to strike Good Shepherd Baptist Church in the Black Sea port of Tuapse (approximately 1,500km or 940 miles south of Moscow) from the Single State Register of Legal Personalities. Under Article 21.1 of the 2001 Law on the State Registration of Legal Personalities and Individual Entrepreneurs, an organisation may be removed from the State Register if it fails to file a tax return or engage in any financial transaction in the course of a year.

Good Shepherd Baptist Church argued that the decision to remove it from the State Register did not take into account the fact that the aims and functions of a religious organisation differ from commercial legal personalities. As the church's activity does not require formal financial transactions, it had thought submission of accounts unnecessary.

Another reason for liquidation is unlicensed educational activity. One of the nine religious educational organisations slated to lose legal status in Moscow, Torat Khaim yeshiva [Jewish school] is fighting the move, its director, Iosif Susaikov, told Forum 18 on 3 September. A second hearing in the case is scheduled for late October. With some 150 students, the yeshiva held a five-year educational licence as a religious educational institution until 2005, when it bought a building it wanted to finish renovating before applying for a new one.

Liquidation would not have happened in earlier years, pointed out Susaikov, "but things are getting stricter and stricter." As religious educational institutions now have to comply with state guidelines for general study, the yeshiva - affiliated to the Congress of Jewish Religious Organisations and Associations of Russia (also known by its Russian acronym, KEROOR) - hopes to continue simply as a religious organisation, its director told Forum 18. At no stage has its operation been disrupted, he added.

Another slated for liquidation in Moscow is the Presbyterian Christian Theological Academy. Contacted on 2 September, however, a spokesperson told Forum 18 that a meeting of Presbyterian pastors had decided not to continue the Academy's activity before the state's decision to dissolve it was known. She was unable to say why this decision was made, and no one who could was available for comment.

Latterly, confusion has persisted over what type of religious activity requires an education licence. The 1997 Religion Law distinguishes between "educational" [obrazovatel'naya] activity - for which a religious organisation might require a licence - and "teaching" [obucheniye], for which it definitely does not. One of the religious organisations dissolved in Chuvashia, a Pentecostal Bible centre lost its legal personality status for unlicensed educational activity in August 2007. It sent an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on 15 April 2008.

In March 2008, Smolensk Regional Court dissolved a local Methodist church for running a Sunday school - which has only four pupils - without an education licence. Following a landmark 10 June 2008 ruling by Russia's Supreme Court, however, "there shouldn't be any more stupidity like that," hopes the vice-chairman of the government's Commission for Issues Concerning Religious Associations, Andrei Sebentsov.

The Supreme Court decision overturned the Smolensk ruling and also established that a licence is required for educational activity only if it is "accompanied by confirmation that the student has attained levels of education prescribed by the state".

Whatever the reason for liquidation, few are objecting. The office of Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman has not received a single complaint on the issue, Mikhail Odintsov, its official dealing with religious freedom issues, told Forum 18 on 3 September. "Maybe they are reconciled to it or pursuing redress through different administrative channels, but we certainly haven't heard anything from them."

The Moscow-based Slavic Centre for Law and Justice, which specialises in religious freedom issues, has similarly received only a handful of enquiries and complaints about liquidation, its lawyer Sergei Chugunov told Forum 18 on 2 September. "Often they don't even know that they've been removed from the State Register, and nothing is done to them as a result."

Nevertheless, the facility for removing legal personalities from the State Register for not formally conducting financial activity should not apply to religious organisations as it fails to take their specific nature into account, believes Andrei Sebentsov, the senior religious affairs official.

The Justice Ministry is to prepare relevant draft amendments to the 2001 Law due for parliamentary consideration in February 2009, he told Forum 18.

#16

In Wake of Georgia War, Armenia Faces Hobson's Choice

By Gayane Abrahamyan

EurasiaNet.org, September 10, 2008

The Georgia-Russia war has placed Armenia in a bind. Officials in Yerevan are feeling pressure to take sides, either supporting its strategic partner, Russia, or its neighbor, Georgia, through which 70 percent of Armenian exports flow. For now, Yerevan is trying to postpone its decision.

Economic issues have so far driven Yerevan's response. But a factor looming in the background of any geopolitical discussion is Russia's decision to recognize Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive]. This has upped the stakes for Yerevan, as Armenian officials do not want to do anything that could impede the realization of their desires to see the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh break free from Azerbaijan.

Currently, economics dictate that Armenia pay attention to its relations with Georgia. Under blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia's only reliable outlet for exports and imports is via Georgia. The war, and its complicated aftermath, has thus inflicted a considerable amount of damage on the Armenian economy.

Much of the harm can be traced to Russian efforts to close Georgia's Black Sea ports, as well as a major railway. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive]. One of the consequences of this action was that some 107 train cars of wheat, 10 fuel containers and 50 additional train cars with miscellaneous goods were left in limbo, Gagik Martirosyan, an advisor to Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan, said in an official statement. The unloading of ships with goods meant for Armenia reportedly resumed only on September 1, according to the government.

The delays are stoking concern about a possible wheat shortage in Yerevan. Repairs on the railway were due to be finished by September 10, according to the Georgian government. An alternative railway line can only handle much smaller loads, Martirosyan claimed.

The owner of one flour processing company told EurasiaNet on September 6 that Armenia would face a continuing shortage of flour if repair of the railway experienced delays. "[P]eople buy 50 sacks of flour instead of the 10-20 they used to get before," said Vanik Musoian, owner of the Mancho Group, which also imports wheat. "Many villagers try not to sell their wheat." Two thousand and five hundred tons of wheat imported by the Mancho Group remain in Batumi, while another 7,000 tons are still in Russia. The company is attempting to import the wheat via Iran.

Gasoline has been another problem. Until late August, many gas stations country-wide posted "No gas" notices. Although the government declared that gas reserves were sufficient to withstand a temporary shortfall, drivers who were forced to wait in long lines to buy gas scoffed at the assurances.

Gagik Torosian, the executive director of Yerevan's Center for Economic Development and Research, believes that if the war had lasted longer, "Armenian citizens would once again have experienced the hardships of the 90s, when people stood in line for both gas and bread."

While the importance of Armenia's relationship with Georgia has been highlighted in recent weeks, there are powerful factors favoring Russia. Russian companies control the country's telecommunications sectors, are responsible for management of its railway network, and have sizeable interests in its energy industry. Russia in 2007 accounted for just over 37 percent of Armenia's foreign investment or \$500 million, according to government figures.

For many Armenians, the present situation underscores a need to enhance Yerevan's long-time policy of complementarity -- trying to maintain good ties with both the United States and Russia. Diversity in foreign relations could provide a hedge against any given geopolitical development in the future becoming a major source of domestic distress. "We will develop and enlarge our bilateral strategic partnership with Russia in every way and plan to enhance and strengthen our partnership with the United States," said President Serzh Sargsyan at a September 3 meeting with diplomats.

For now, Armenia is striving to avoid a choice and remain on friendly terms with both Russia and Georgia. On August 13, President Sargsyan called Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to express sympathy, and then a day later sent a letter of condolence to Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Russia seems willing to allow Armenia and other formerly Soviet states to remain neutral. On September 3, for example Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev issued a statement saying that "Russia will not impose pressure on any country to recognize the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

For one analyst, the true test of Russia's partnership with Armenia will be whether Moscow stays true to its pledge concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia. "Armenia is in Russia's hands," said Stepan Grigorian, chairman of Yerevan's Analytical Center for Globalization and Regional Cooperation. "But if Russia considers us partners, then it will not impose pressure."

Other Armenian analysts and politicians believe that, sooner or later, the Kremlin will indeed expect Yerevan to provide political support for Moscow's actions. If this happens, it will be the Karabakh issue that weighs most heavily in the minds of Yerevan policy makers. Armenia can't ignore Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and then expect diplomatic help in any effort to win potential recognition of Karabakh, analysts say. "The fates of these two countries are much like the one of" Nagorno-Karabakh, analyst Levon Melik-Shahnazarian said. "If we don't say that now, we will lose the moral and the political right to blame any other country, which does not recognize the independence of [Karabakh] because of its own interests."

Opposition parliamentarian Larisa Alaverdian, a member of the Heritage Party, is advocating a way to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while still potentially preventing a diplomatic falling out with Tbilisi: only the Armenian parliament should recognize the independence of Georgia's separatist territories. "The risks are high that relations with Georgia may be damaged. That is the reason I suggest that only the National Assembly recognizes them, which is just an expression of popular will and can't have consequences for the executive branch," commented Alaverdian.

In his September 3 comments, Sargsyan set recognition of Karabakh as the precondition for any recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. "Having the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia can't recognize another formation in the same situation until it recognizes the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic," he said.

#17

**Volgograd Seminar Focuses on Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia
Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, September 11, 2008**

VOLGOGRAD, Russia - This week, Volgograd hosted an informative seminar on the topical issue of anti-Semitism. Hosted in the grand conference hall of the Volgograd Hotel, this event was co-organized by the Jewish community of Volgograd, the Moscow Human Rights Bureau and the Moscow Anti-Fascist Center. The seminar was designed as a legal School for journalists, state officials, and law enforcement officers in aims of curbing the existence of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in society. One of the outcomes of the event was a discussion about a possible mechanism for fighting ethnic intolerance and xenophobic tendencies.

Numerous high-profile figures gave feature presentations, including Alexander Brod, the Director of the Moscow Human Rights Bureau, and Yevgeniy Proshechkin, the Chairman of the Moscow Anti-Fascist Center. Yael Yoffe, the Chairman of the Board for the Jewish Community Center in Volgograd, highlighted the Jewish perspective at the event, while numerous state officials and leaders of various non-governmental organizations also took their turn presenting on this hot issue.

About 30 people took part in the seminar. The majority of them essentially proved to be officials from different structures in the provincial and municipal administration, members of the regional branches of Russia's leading political parties, deputies from the regional parliament, journalists from various different publications. All participants in the forum gained a solid foundation about these problems.

The Jewish community of Volgograd - a member of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia - is one of the most outspoken communities in Russia when it comes to issues of anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. It has led several different campaigns to fight these tendencies and maintains an ongoing relationship with local law enforcement agencies and human rights agencies at the local, as well as national levels.

#18

Russia Shows Softer Side If Neighbors Eschew NATO

By Alan Cullison

Wall Street Journal, September 11, 2008

MOSCOW -- Condemned in the West over its incursion in Georgia, the Kremlin has sought support from traditional allies in the former Soviet Union. But leaders in the region, many with their own separatist problems and fears about Moscow's intentions, have been slow to respond.

Now, Russia is hoping to win hearts by highlighting its peacekeeping efforts in the former Soviet republic of Moldova. It hopes to show that it can provide benefits to countries that keep their distance from the West, particularly those that stay out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Moldova, a landlocked country sandwiched between NATO member Romania and NATO-aspirant Ukraine, has a long-running conflict with Moscow-backed separatists in a sliver of territory along its eastern border called Transdnistria. The Kremlin is offering the Moldovan government the prospect of resolving the conflict. But in return, Moscow wants Moldova to renounce its West-leaning aspirations and refrain from following Romania into the European Union and NATO.

Moscow's help in bringing separatists to heel has "always been a kind of carrot that Russia could dangle in front of Moldova and offer as a reward," said Dmitry Furman, professor of history at the Institute of Europe in Russia's Academy of Sciences. "Moldova can have the carrot if it doesn't get too close to the West."

Last week, Mr. Medvedev met with the leader of the separatists, Igor Smirnov, at the Russian president's summer residence in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi. Mr. Smirnov emerged to tell reporters he thought a solution was possible and that he was ready to resume talks with the Moldovan government.

Officials close to the discussions confirm that Russia has stepped up its efforts to mediate the conflict. The Russian president also met with Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin last month and in the coming weeks may be hosting a face-to-face meeting between the separatist leader and the Moldovan president in Russia.

One hurdle is that some Moldovans see the Kremlin as part of the problem. Russian troops stationed in Moldova supported separatists when they wrested Transdniestria from Moldova's control in 1992. Those troops remain, and Mr. Smirnov's separatist government, dominated by ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, has dug in and established its own currency, license plates and postage stamps.

Western diplomats say Transdniestria would have withered away long ago without Russian help. With a population of a half million settled mostly on one bank of the Dniester River that separates Moldova and Ukraine, the region is about 250 miles long and six miles wide. The government's official Web page says the region has its own unique history dating back to 600 B.C.

President Voronin came close to signing in 2003 a Russian-brokered deal with separatists that would have re-integrated Transdniestria into the country but allowed it broad autonomy. At the last moment, Mr. Voronin backed out of the deal. Russian officials blame the U.S. and Europe for sabotaging it.

Today Russia is trying to make itself the sole broker of a deal, diplomats say, but Moldova has sought talks that include other parties as mediators, and the EU and U.S. as observers.

Mr. Furman said Russia will be ambivalent about resolving the conflict, because it would then lose its leverage over Moldova's NATO ambitions. Moldova's leadership "wants Transdniestria back so badly that they will do anything, and say anything," said Mr. Furman. "But even if Voronin makes these promises, what happens when he leaves office?"

#19

Moscow rejects S. Ossetia unity pledge

By Stefan Wagstyl

Financial Times, September 11, 2008

Eduard Kokoity, the leader of South Ossetia, attends a rally in Tskhinvali, the capital of the breakaway region

Eduard Kokoity, president of the breakaway Georgian territory of South Ossetia, on Thursday pledged to unite with Russia by merging with its autonomous republic of North Ossetia.

"We are now any independent state. We are looking forward to joining North Ossetia and the Russian Federation," said Mr Kokoity in a meeting with foreign academics and journalists in the Black Sea resort of Sochi. However, hours later, Vladimir Putin, Russian prime minister told the same group of academics and journalists in Sochi that independence was the only option for the territory.

Mr Kokoity said Russia's recognition of South Ossetia as an independent state, which he claimed would be followed by recognition by other countries, was "a necessary stage we have to go through" on the way to independence.

Although he did not give a timetable, Mr Kokoity's declaration was initially seen as the clearest public statement so far of the true intentions of South Ossetia and Russia. Later however, Mr Kokoity said his comments had been misunderstood.

"We are not planning to give up our independence, achieved at the cost of colossal casualties, and South Ossetia is not planning to join Russia," Mr Kokoity said, according to Russian news agency, Interfax.

Russia last month recognised as independent states both South Ossetia, and Georgia's second separatist territory of Abkhazia after Russian troops fought off a brief Georgian attack on South Ossetia.

Both territories split from Georgia de facto in civil wars in the early 1990s in which thousands died and many more became refugees. While Abkhazia was left with around 240,000, the much-smaller South Ossetia, had any estimated 50,000-70,000.

Mr Kokoity said union with North Ossetia would be a "restoration of historic justice" because Ossetians were "divided against their will".

The two territories inhabited by ethnic Ossetians speaking the same language are separated by the Caucasus mountains. But they joined the Russian Empire as one nation in 1774 and proved among the more loyal to Moscow of the warring peoples of the Caucasus.

The two Ossetias were divided by the internal boundaries of the Soviet union which left South Ossetia in the Soviet republic of Georgia and northern Ossetia in the Russian republic.

Mr Kokoity, an ex-wrestler installed by the Kremlin, also accused the US of helping to provoke last month's brief war by arming and training the forces of Georgia's pro-west president, Mikheil Saakashvili.

Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, had on visit to Tbilisi in July "pushed the bloody regime of Saakashvili into attack."

US training – named Immediate Response - ended just before the August 7 Georgian assault on Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital, and US-trained soldiers participated in the attack, said Mr Kokoity.

His claims were echoed in a separate meeting with Sergey Bagapsh, president of Abkhazia, who accused the west of giving military support to Georgia and had "at least moral responsibility for what happened in Tskhinvali."

Mr Bagapsh also said that while it was Georgia's choice whether to join Nato, entering the western alliance would increase instability in the region.

Unlike Mr Kokoity, he committed himself to longterm independence, albeit in close alliance with Russia. Abkhazia would reach agreements with Moscow on military and naval bases with enough troops that "nobody will threaten us."

International recognition of Abkhazia would take time but it would come, said Mr Bagapsh. "If the world doesn't recognise us, it will recognise us tomorrow. Almost every country has separatist problems. We are not in a hurry"

He put tourism at the centre of his economic development ideas, saying that Abkhazia, a country of 240,000 on the Black Sea, last year attracted 1.2m Tourists

#20

Ukraine's EU hopes dashed

By Tony Barber

Financial Times, September 9, 2008

The European Union declined on Tuesday to offer Ukraine a clear path to EU membership, frustrating Ukrainian officials who said the bloc had thrown away a golden opportunity to stabilise its eastern frontier and encourage political and economic reform in Kiev.

A communiqué issued at an EU-Ukrainian summit set out a framework for closer ties between Kiev and the 27-nation bloc, but omitted the crucial words “membership perspective” to describe Ukraine’s future relationship with the EU.

Ukraine, a country of 46m people wedged between the EU and Russia, had hoped that Russia’s military assault on Georgia last month, and its subsequent attempt to partition the former Soviet republic, might prompt the EU to go the extra mile for Ukraine.

Tuesday’s communiqué affirmed the EU’s commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and held out the prospect of agreements on free trade and easier travel for Ukrainians to EU countries, but stopped short of a promise of EU accession.

“Be clear that this agreement shuts no door, and maybe it opens some doors. This is the most we could offer, but I believe it to be a substantial step,” Nicolas Sarkozy, France’s president, told reporters.

Diplomats said Germany and the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent Belgium, were the most reluctant to state clearly that Ukraine could one day join the EU.

The three Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden and the UK, while recognising that Ukrainian accession was not an immediate possibility, all sympathised with its aspirations.

France, which currently holds the EU’s rotating presidency, appreciated the need to send positive signals to Kiev, but was unwilling to make a strong commitment to Ukraine without a shift in the German and Dutch positions, diplomats said.

Ukraine did its cause little good last week when the ruling coalition split in acrimony, enhancing the nation’s reputation for political instability.

For now, Ukraine will have to make do with an “association agreement” with the EU, a pact that for Balkan countries such as Albania, Macedonia and Serbia represents the first step on the path to membership, but for Ukraine carries no such implications.

The association agreement is expected to be ready in about a year, and President Viktor Yushchenko said on Tuesday that he looked forward to signing it. “We’ve made remarkable progress over the past 12 months,” he said, making it clear he had not abandoned hope Ukraine could eventually join the EU. But some Ukrainian officials said their government might be wary of signing the association accord, lest this be interpreted in certain EU capitals as Kiev’s formal acceptance of a status falling permanently short of membership.

EU officials put a positive gloss on Tuesday’s summit, stressing the communiqué did not explicitly exclude EU accession. But Ukraine fears pressure for stronger action in support of Kiev’s aspirations may fade if the crisis in Georgia calms down.

#21

Russia's Sandy Democracy Doesn't Fly

By Yulia Latynina

The Moscow Times, September 10, 2008

As everyone who watches Channel One and Rossia television knows, the West does not have a lot of warm feelings for Russia and is definitely out to get us. The West wants to create a unipolar world — one that would like Russia to become its permanent appendage.

In response, Moscow is trying to create its own unipolar world, recruiting countries like Venezuela, Libya, North Korea, Iran, Syria and Cuba to its anti-West axis.

Despite its deep dislike of the West, Russia's patriotic elite drive Mercedes cars, educate their children in London, buy villas in Nice and keep their money in Swiss bank accounts. Its stores sell Finnish toilets, Western designer clothes and German refrigerators. Unfortunately, there is not much worth buying from Syria or North Korea. The only thing they can produce is a lot of anti-Western rhetoric, and unfortunately, you can't package this bluster and sell it in stores.

It is also interesting that the oil-trading company Gunvor, owned in part by Gennady Timchenko, who has close ties to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, is not registered in Venezuela, Syria or in its own native Russia, but in bourgeois Switzerland.

We all know why the West didn't care much for the Soviet Union. After all, it built a progressive, democratic and affluent communist society that the Western bourgeoisie envied with a passion.

But I can't understand why the West dislikes the current ideology of post-Soviet Russia. After all, it abandoned communism a long time ago, and it sells its precious oil to the West through Gunvor and gas through RosUkrEnergO at fair market prices.

If you take a closer look at the essence of the Kremlin's ideology, you will be shocked. You shouldn't believe all of the terrible stuff the West says about Russia. As it turns out, Russia is building a genuine democracy, not the sham democracy like in the West. Moreover, it is not seizing private property and nationalizing it to enrich high-ranking state officials; it is building a true market economy, not the kind found in the West. Finally, it did not initiate a war against Georgia as a result of Putin's personal vendetta against President Mikheil Saakashvili. It carried out a peacekeeping operation in accordance with international law, and it enforced a genuine peace, not the pseudo-peace you see in the West.

Anthropologists have written a great deal about the 20th-century "cargo cults" that arose in Melanesia. Adherents of those primitive faiths believed that all the amazing Western goods (or cargo) such as automobiles, guns and clothing were originally created by spiritual means by their ancestors. These modern goods had been intended for the Melanesian people, but the cursed white people stole everything before the goods could be delivered to the Melanesians. After seeing real airplanes for the first time, the Melanesians built one from sand, thinking it would fly.

The Kremlin has taken a page from cargo cults. It is trying to build democracy, a market economy, and it is attempting to enforce peace. But the only problem is that all of these institutions are also made of sand. Like the Melanesian airplane, none of them can fly very well.

The Melanesian people were certain that those infernal white people didn't like them, and they had two ironclad arguments to prove it. First, the whites had seized all of the wonderful goods that the Melanesians' ancestors had intended for them. Second, their airplane of sand couldn't get off the ground — probably because the white people had cast a spell on it.

There are two basic ways to approach life. In one, you build a real airplane and fly it. In the other, you build an airplane of sand and then blame the evil West and its insidious plots and machinations for the fact that it won't fly.

#22

Russia's Armed Intervention into Georgia [hearing] U.S. Helsinki Commission, September 10, 2008

Hearing: Russia, Georgia, and the Return of Power Politics

Attending: Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) and Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), co-chairmen; Congressman Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Ranking Member

Witnesses: Matthew J. Bryza, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State; David Bakradze, Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia and Former Foreign Minister; Paul

A. Goble, Director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy in Baku; Paul Saunders, Executive Director, the Nixon Center

The commission condemns Russia's military force in Georgia. Senator Cardin said Russia is moving in the wrong direction regarding the freedoms of Russia's citizens. The U.S. needs to "constructively engage" Russia, but first and foremost, the U.S. cannot allow, tolerate or condone Russia's use of force in Georgia.

Mr. Bryza's testimony covered the history of the conflict in Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia since Georgia's independence in 1991. Mr. Bryza explained the U.S. has continuously tried to work with Russia, acknowledging its interests and proximity to these regions and tried to convince Russia's leaders that a successful Georgia will help Russia achieve stability along its southern border.

Russia's actions on August 7 demonstrated disregard for fundamental principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and of inviolability of borders. Bryza said Russia further escalated the conflict by recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on August 26, an action that was condemned by the European Union, NATO, and foreign ministers of the G7 countries. Bryza suggests the immediate policy be that the U.S. demands Russia fully implement the ceasefire agreement. Furthermore, the U.S. needs to support Georgia by addressing humanitarian, economic and democratic concerns. Other objectives are to prevent Russia from drawing a line through Europe and reverting to "sphere of influence" policies, and to explore ways to work with other countries on Russia's periphery to strengthen and stabilize the region.

Mr. Bakradze spoke on behalf of Georgia to make several points. This is the first time Russia has tried to change borders by use of military force since Soviet times. Georgian pipelines are the only alternate route to Europe and without them, several countries would be isolated from energy. While many have referred to Kosovo as a precedent, he points out the major difference: in Kosovo, international intervention stopped ethnic cleansing while in Georgia, Russia's intervention caused ethnic cleansing. Mr. Bakradze questions what kind of partner Russia is to the U.S. and Europe when it is breaking international laws.

Congressman Hastings questioned why Georgia proceeded with military force even though U.S. officials had warned Georgia not to use force. Bakradze agreed that Georgia had been warned many times, but had never specifically discussed with U.S. officials an attack by Georgia on South Ossetia. When Hastings asked whether Georgia started military action, Bakradze responded the context and not individual events are what is significant. Other countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa understand that it is not a choice between Russia and Georgia, but about basic principles.

Congressman Smith asked questions about humanitarian aid, and for numbers or estimates on casualties. Bakradze welcomes humanitarian aid, and it is too soon to determine the exact numbers of casualties as there still are missing people.

Mr. Saunders and Mr. Goble believe the U.S. has over-personalized relationships with foreign leaders. Saunders recommended a short term policy to salvage American credibility in the region; support Georgia, ensure Russia follows through in their commitments, salvaging cold war security structures in the Europe. In the long term, he calls for a serious debate about NATO and new ideas for a sustainable security structure in Europe.

Goble describes this situation as a disaster that was waiting to happen and which may be repeated. If the territorial integrity of Georgia is to be upheld, one must distinguish between Georgia's military action on South Ossetia, a territory within its borders, and Russia's use of military force in South Ossetia, where Russia crossed a border into another country. The U.S. must insist on standards of international behavior, and Russia cannot be a full member of the international community without playing by the rules. In terms of policy, Goble recommends that the United States make clear we will not acknowledge borders or territory obtained in such conflicts. He also mentions the need to expand our knowledge and experts in the area.

Summary by Alla Lipsky, NCSJ Program Assistant

#23

Situation in Georgia [hearing]

Senate Armed Services Committee, September 9, 2008

Attending: Chairman Carl Levin (D- MI), Senators John Warner (R-VA), Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), Mel Martinez (R-FL), Ben Nelson (D-FL), John Thune (R-SD), Hillary Clinton (D-NY), Bayh (D-IN)

Witnesses: Eric S. Feldman, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Department of Defense; Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State; Lieutenant General John M. Paxton, Jr., USMC, Director of Operations, J-3, The Joint Staff; Brigadier General Michael T. Flynn, USA, Director for Intelligence, J-2, The Joint Staff

The hearing explored the implications of the events in Georgia, the sphere of influence of Russia, how the U.S. should proceed in assisting Georgia, NATO membership and control of energy (oil/gas) in the area.

When asked about U.S. warnings to Georgia against taking military actions and whether there may have been mixed signals, Fried explained the U.S. had been extremely clear with warnings to Georgia for many months, that any military actions by Georgia would be a disaster. Fried stated that Georgia deserves military support from the U.S. or NATO, but based on assessment teams evaluation of the situation.

The conflict's most severe consequence for Russia is its self-imposed isolation. Senator Bayh questioned the intentions and interests of Russia's leaders, asking whether they care. Fried explained that Russia's poor demographics and extraction based economy weaken Russia under isolation.

Senator Lieberman mentioned that the Ukrainian president has expressed fear Russia is already acting similarly in South Crimea. There is general concern about Russia's sphere of influence, as it is issuing passports, and as seen in Georgia, taking actions on behalf of their citizens abroad. Russia, he said, cannot veto the rights of countries and we must prevent Russia from drawing a line through Europe.

Chairman Levin asked whether the U.S. will continue working with Russia in discussions on Iran. Fried explained that it remains in our national interest to continue cooperating with Russia to pressure Iran against continuing its nuclear enrichment program. While Russia's current path is isolationist, there is hope that cooler heads will prevail, and the U.S. must be open to Russia reconsidering its current path.

In response to questions from Senator Martinez, Fried said NATO should extend to Ukraine and Georgia programs to help prepare those countries for membership in NATO. Past NATO enlargement has helped nations in disputes with ethnic problems. The immediate plan is to get Russian troops out of Georgia, work with France and the European Union to enforce the ceasefire, help Georgia recover and stabilize, and carefully evaluate the situation.

Summary by Alla Lipsky, NCSJ Program Assistant

#24

Rags To Republican

Since emigrating from Kiev, Marina Kats has raised herself from poverty and launched a successful legal and business career. Now she's hoping to become the first Russian-American member of Congress.

By Walter Ruby

NY Jewish Week, September 10, 2008

Can a Russian-speaking woman with a rags-to-riches personal story and conservative political views unseat a popular incumbent in a Democratic stronghold in Philadelphia — in what is expected to be a very Democratic year?

Marina Kats is the first to acknowledge that she is a decided underdog in her campaign to defeat two-term incumbent Rep. Allyson Schwartz for a U.S. House seat in Pennsylvania's 13th Congressional District. The

district is an unlikely mix of gritty Northeast Philadelphia and affluent suburban stretches of nearby Montgomery County, a former GOP bastion that has been trending Democratic in recent years.

Yet Kats, 47, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1979 as an 18-year-old immigrant from Kiev who barely spoke a word of English, and today lives in the swanky Montgomery County suburb of Abingdon, has been overcoming long odds all of her life. She's raised herself from poverty to become an attorney and entrepreneur with a personal fortune of upwards of \$10 million. Having already contributed \$300,000 to her own campaign and expecting to take in hundreds of thousands more in upcoming fundraising events, including one being planned in the New York-Russian speaking community next month, Kats expects to have \$1.3 million cash on hand by late September. That is nearly \$1 million less than the \$2.2 million Schwartz already has on hand, but, as Kats puts it, "It will certainly be enough for me to be competitive."

In addition, Kats, a self-declared "John McCain Republican" who bucks the party line with a pro-choice stance even while staking out mainly conservative positions, brings to the table what she calls "hometown" appeal in the Russian, Ukrainian and Polish immigrant communities of Northeast Philadelphia, an area that is usually Democratic.

Kats is one of two Russian-Jewish immigrants running for seats in the House this year. The other, Max Yashirin, a 25-year-old Iraq war veteran who is running as an anti-war Democrat in a heavily Republican district in eastern Nebraska, is an even greater underdog than Kats. Yet following the election of Moscow-born and raised Alec Brook-Krasny to the New York State Assembly in 2006, the presence in congressional races of two Russian Jews brings pride to Russian speakers across the country.

Feliks Frenkel, a Westchester-based arbitrageur who serves on the board of directors of New York UJA-Federation, has given a campaign contribution to Kats and is urging other prominent Russian Jews in New York and Philadelphia to get behind her. "I think it is an amazing achievement that in only 30 years, an immigrant community like ours is producing people to run for Congress."

Kats is banking on her business experience as a draw for voters. She has been successful in various ventures, including real estate and as owner of a Philadelphia-area radio station.

"In tough economic times like these," she said, "we need to elect responsible businesspeople like me — people who know how to make a payroll, how to buy health insurance for their employees and not to spend more than they take in. My opponent is a career politician who never worked in the private sector. She is in favor of raising taxes, which I oppose, and opposes responsible off-shore gas drilling, which I support in order to bring down gas prices."

Schwartz, 59, who defeated her GOP opponent in 2006 by nearly 2-to-1, sees things differently.

According to Schwartz spokesperson Rachel Magnuson, "The congresswoman is extremely proud of her record on behalf of her constituents. She founded and ran a nonprofit women's health center and spent years as an elected official in the Pennsylvania State Senate and now in Congress. Throughout her career, she has fought for affordable quality health care for every single American."

Magnuson said that Schwartz supports middle-class tax relief, but opposes what she called "the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy" and opposes offshore drilling because "the congresswoman believes we cannot drill our way out of the energy crisis."

Observers of Pennsylvania politics agree that Kats is a decided underdog, but are not prepared to dismiss her entirely, largely because of her wealth and impressive Cinderella life story.

Brad Visoli, a political reporter for The Bulletin, a daily newspaper in suburban Philadelphia, said he believes the local Republican Party chose Kats as its candidate mainly because of her ability to finance her own campaign. "It is also true that Kats is the prototype of the kind of moderate Republican who can be viable in the 13th District. Her problem is that it will take time for her to establish herself as a widely known figure in the District."

Kats, who emigrated from the Soviet Union with her parents “in order to escape anti-Semitism and to live in freedom,” attended community college shortly after her arrival in the U.S. until her improved English made it possible for her to transfer to Temple University. Later, Kats attended Temple Law School while paying the tuition bills with part-time jobs as a waitress and dental assistant.

After working briefly for an established law firm upon graduating Temple Law School, Kats founded her own firm, Kats, Jamison, Van der Veen & Associates, of which she is today president and owner. The firm, which she describes as the largest in her electoral district, specializes in personal injury, small business and immigration issues. Named one of Philadelphia’s “Super Lawyers” in 2004 and 2008 by Philadelphia Magazine, Kats has little patience with attacks from leaders of her own party against so-called “junk lawsuits.”

She once confronted President George W. Bush’s then-top aide, Karl Rove when he attacked trial lawyers during a Republican candidates’ school she attended. “I got up during the question-and-answer session and told Rove that, contrary to what he had just said, trial lawyers give a voice to people who would not normally have a voice,” Kats said.

In addition to her legal practice, Kats, a single mother of two daughters, has also been successful in various business ventures, including real estate and as owner of a Philadelphia-area radio station which used to play oldies but now features a talk format with local personalities, including Kats herself, who hosts a Russian-language talk show.

Kats also serves as president of the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce of Philadelphia, and on the boards of Temple University, Federation of Jewish Family Services, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and Einstein Medical Center.

She recently endowed a room at the Temple Law School, where just over 20 years ago, Kats said, “I used to sit during class and worry whether I could afford to spend 50 cents for a cup of coffee or should instead use it for gas to get home.”

#25
Israel’s Military on Display in Georgia
By Marc Perelman
Forward, September 11, 2008

When an Israeli-made drone was shot down over the Black Sea this past spring in the run-up to the war between Russia and Georgia, it brought to the forefront a recurrent Israeli dilemma: By exporting its military know-how, is Israel endangering its diplomatic standing?

Israel’s military assistance to Georgia, including the doomed drone, thrust into the spotlight two competing interests — nurturing a major source of income, and cultivating ties with major powers, such as Russia, that have long-standing military ties with archenemies such as Syria and Iran.

The issue is especially sensitive in Israel, because the tight government oversight of foreign weapons sales exposes the country to the potential for diplomatic setbacks, such as the one in Georgia.

“Israel is always playing a careful balancing act between pursuing its own interest and making sure it does not harm its friends,” said Ephraim Sneh, a former deputy defense minister who has been involved in recent legislative efforts to tighten arms export rules.

Israeli officials are adamant that those private sales are being carefully vetted before they are authorized by the government. But there are indications that some changes are afoot. The Israeli press has inferred that Foreign Ministry officials were becoming more influential in an oversight committee that vets all arms sales abroad. In addition, the arms export mechanism was tightened in a 2007 law that followed complaints from Washington about arms sales to “sensitive” countries, especially China.

While most of Israel's weapons deals are done by private companies, "not a single bullet leaves Israel without government approval," according to Sneh. Georgia has stepped up its weapons requests in recent years, as its relations with Russia have soured. Despite Israel's refusal to allow the sale of most offensive weaponry to Georgia, Jerusalem has been drawn into the conflict.

Israel and Georgia have enjoyed a friendly relationship since the former Soviet Republic gained its independence in 1991. The ties improved noticeably after the election in 2003 of the staunchly pro-Western president Mikhail Saakashvili. As he sought to reassert control over the two Russian-backed semi-autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Saakashvili began to buy weapons to bolster Georgia's weak military. Willing partners included the United States and other Western countries, as well as Israel, which since 2000 has sold an estimated \$300 million worth of weapons to Georgia.

The business relationship was facilitated by two Georgian ministers who are Jewish and fluent in Hebrew: Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili and, more important, Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili, 30. While Israel did not agree to sell tanks, planes or missiles, it did authorize the sale of infantry weapons, rockets and night-vision communications, as well as the upgrade of Georgia's Su-25 ground-attack fighters. It also allowed the sale of intelligence surveillance equipment, including Skylark and Hermes 450 unmanned planes. Those drones would soon become a major issue as tensions from Georgia's breakaway regions simmered.

In the past six months, the pro-Moscow government of Abkhazia claims to have downed seven Georgian drones. Georgia has denied the reports, except in one instance. On April 20, one of its Israeli-made Hermes 450s was shot down off the coast from Abkhazia. Georgia accused Russia of downing it, a charge supported by a United Nations probe, but Moscow has denied this.

Russia then sent Israel's foreign minister a letter of protest, asking that it stop supplying military hardware to Georgia. The letter pointed out that Russia had sometimes heeded Israel's requests to refrain from supplying weapons systems to states seen as threatening to Israel, according to a lengthy exposé in the weekend magazine of the Israeli daily Ma'ariv. The Foreign Ministry then asked the Defense Ministry to cancel the authorizations to sell offensive weapons to Georgia and to allow only the sale of defensive weapons, as well as military training, to proceed, Ma'ariv reported.

Israeli officials are quick to point out that they wisely rejected repeat requests for arms from Georgia in the months leading up to the outbreak of hostilities with Russia in early August. The most ambitious one involved the purchase of 200 Merkava tanks, which was vetoed by the Defense Ministry.

Georgian officials, however, publicly denied that Israel had cut back on weapons sales. Moreover, they showered praise on Israel's military help after the beginning of the hostilities last month, with Saakashvili stating at a press conference that "Israeli weapons have been very effective." Minister Yakobashvili told Israel Army Radio that "Israel should be proud of its military, which trained Georgian soldiers." In the end, Georgia's army proved to be no match for the Russian military, which has repeatedly accused Western powers and Israel of arming Georgia.

Anatoly Nogovitsyn, Russia's deputy army chief, said during a press conference in mid-August that Israel was providing the Georgian military with mines, explosive charges, special explosives for clearing minefields and eight kinds of unmanned aerial vehicles. But he also indicated that some sales had been canceled. "In 2007, Israeli experts trained Georgian commandos in Georgia and there were plans to supply heavy weaponry, electronic weapons, tanks and other arms at a later date, but the deal didn't work out," Nogovitsyn told reporters.

The Hermes drones were sold to Georgia by Elbit Systems, an Israeli manufacturer whose representatives in Georgia were former minister and Tel Aviv mayor Ronnie Milo and his brother Shlomo, a former director-general of Israel Military Industries. The Milo brothers were also reportedly involved in the sale of a rocket system called Links, which is manufactured by IMI, as well as in the aborted Merka tank deal. They have declined to comment on their Georgia dealings.

In addition, several former senior Israeli army officers have been involved in training Georgian army infantry battalions. One such officer, Gal Hirsch, resigned from the army two years ago, after being heavily criticized by an official inquiry into the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah that precipitated what is now known as the Second Lebanon War. Hirsch then set up a security company called Defense Shields and received approval from the Defense Ministry to train elite anti-terrorist units in the Georgian army. The effort was undertaken in tandem with Global C S T, a company owned by retired major general Israel Ziv, and Nirtal, a company headed by reserve officer Nir Shaul.

Although the companies announced that they had completed their projects in Georgia before August 7, the date the fighting began, the presence of Israeli trainers and weaponry has been noted in Russia, among anti-Israel circles and even by Hezbollah's secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, who described the Russian military victory over Georgia as a defeat for Israel. "Gal Hirsch, who was defeated in Lebanon, went to Georgia, and they, too, lost because of him." He made the remarks last month in a speech marking the two-year anniversary of the Lebanon War.

In recent weeks, Israeli officials have gone out of their way to smooth the tensions with Russia over the war with Georgia. In addition to Russia's diplomatic and economic clout, its weapons sales have been a major headache for Israel. The most immediate concern is Russia's sale to Iran of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems, which would help Iran defend its nuclear installations from aerial attacks. Likewise, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's visit to Russia in the wake of the Georgian war has fueled concerns in Jerusalem that Russia was retaliating against Israel by stepping up military support to Damascus.

Despite the diplomatic backlash with Russia, Sneh believes that Israel "handled the Georgia situation properly" and that it had carefully vetted the arms sales "to ensure that they would not have strategic consequences. It just so happens that a war broke out."

#26

Medvedev: Russia to protect its zone of influence AP, September 12, 2008

MOSCOW - President Dmitry Medvedev warned Friday that Russia would protect its interests in other ex-Soviet lands and also make friends elsewhere irrespective of Western opinion.

The stern, defiant statement came amid heightened tensions with the West over Russia's war in Georgia last month.

Medvedev said at a meeting with Western political experts that Russia considers relations with its ex-Soviet neighbors a "No. 1 priority" and views them as part of its traditional sphere of influence.

"Our neighbors are close to us in many respects, and are a traditional area of interest for the Russian nation," he said. "We are so close to each other, it would be impossible to tear us apart, to say Russia has to embark on one path, and our neighbors on another. The issue here is our shared common history, the connection of our economies and close affinities of our souls."

Medvedev also said that Russia would build economic and military ties with nations willing to do so even if the West dislikes some of these alliances.

"There are many other interesting places in the world with governments maintaining friendly ties with us," he said. "And if they like developing economic, humanitarian and military ties with us, we won't say no."

Medvedev added that Russia's newly found economic might makes it capable of forging new alliances.

"We couldn't afford it during the 1990s, we were too weak and feeble," he said. "Now we can and will do that. Any country eager to befriend Russia will meet our friendly attitude."

Medvedev didn't name any specific nation.

"If someone doesn't like that, what can we do? We don't like everything we see either," he added.

Earlier this week, Medvedev sent a pair of Russian strategic bombers to land in Venezuela — a deployment to the Western Hemisphere unprecedented since the Cold War times. It will be followed in November by a visit of a Russian Navy squadron and patrol planes to Venezuela for joint maneuvers in the Caribbean.

The move was an apparent retaliation to the U.S. navy ships delivering humanitarian aid to Georgia — a move that angered Moscow.

#27

**Ukraine president accuses rivals of "coup d'etat"
Kyiv Post, September 12, 2008**

President Viktor Yushchenko accused his two arch rivals on Thursday of plotting a "coup d'etat" by joining forces to cut his powers and replace a pro-Western "orange" coalition in parliament.

A coalition of groups loyal to the president and prime minister, collapsed after Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party walked out last week. It denounced Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's tactical voting alliance in the chamber with the more Russia-friendly party of ex-premier Viktor Yanukovich.

"The de facto formation in parliament of a new coalition is the implementation of a political scenario with a sole aim -- to carry out a coup d'etat through a redistribution of powers," the president's press service quoted Yushchenko as saying.

Ukrainian politics has been in turmoil since "Orange Revolution" rallies brought Yushchenko to power in 2004, putting the country at odds with Moscow over the president's drive to move the country closer to the West.

Tymoshenko, his fiery ally during the rallies, was named his first prime minister but was sacked seven months later. She returned to office last year, but the two again quarrelled.

Tymoshenko's bloc and Yanukovich's Regions Party this month approved amendments to legislation reducing the president's powers in favour of the government and parliament.

Yushchenko said he could not understand "a union between a national bourgeoisie and social populists. It is most difficult to say where this 'marriage' might lead."

LOST MAJORITY

Yanukovich draws much of his support from Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine. He was backed by Russia in a 2004 presidential election won by Yushchenko after the Supreme Court ordered a rerun of the ballot on grounds of vote-rigging.

He has since moderated his backing for Moscow, but remains opposed to Yushchenko's key foreign policy plank of securing fast-track membership of NATO.

If the current "orange" coalition, which has anyway lost its majority in parliament, cannot be rebuilt this weekend, parties have 30 days to form a new one. Should they fail, the president can call what would be the third election in as many years.

Yushchenko, in a separate interview with Western newspapers, restated his resolve to win a NATO Membership Action Plan at a December summit of the alliance -- despite limited support among Ukrainians and fierce Russian opposition.

"After events in Georgia, there is only one way to guarantee Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty -- joining collective European security structures," he said.

"It is also in NATO's interests to extend peace and stability eastward."

Russia's Foreign Ministry issued a new warning to Kiev to alter its "unfriendly" stand towards Russia, particularly its "rapid moves to secure NATO membership" and its denunciations of Moscow's intervention in Georgia.

#28

Rabbi, son attacked in Ukraine

By Yael Branovsky

YNetNews, September 12, 2008

Anti-Semitic attack: The rabbi of the Jewish community in Vinnitsa, Ukraine and his three-year-old son were assaulted Thursday by a group of anti-Semites. The rabbi, Shaul Horowitz, told Ynet he filed a complaint with local police, who arrested several suspects.

The rabbi said about 200 guests were on hand to celebrate his son's birthday. At one point, the rabbi and his son accompanied a guest from Canada who wanted to buy a calling card in a nearby store.

"We were walking, with my friend dressed in Hassidic garb, when suddenly we heard hateful chants. A group of young men were yelling "heil Hitler" and "we'll kill the Jews." About five youngsters ran in our direction, bypassed us, and started yelling and pushing us," the rabbi said. "I tried to protect my son, but the small child was punched in the face. They also kicked the guest from Canada."

Rabbi Horowitz added that many passersby in the area refrained from interfering. Fortunately, a motorist who happened to be in the area picked them up in his jeep.

"We then saw the police so we ran over and filed a complaint. They immediately arrested the youngsters. We're not talking about drunken people who didn't know what they were doing, but rather, guys who looked normative," the rabbi said. "They simply hate Jews. It ended well just because of those people in the jeep who saved us. We've been living here for six years and this is the first time it happened.

The attack victims were taken for tests at a local hospital and later released. The town's mayor contacted the rabbi and promised to treat the incident sternly. The Jewish community in town numbers roughly 4,000 people.