

**WASHINGTON, D.C. April 17, 2009**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

**FROM: Richard Stone, NCSJ Chairman;  
Alexander Smukler, NCSJ President;  
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director;  
Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs**



In Brief: NCSJ Student Mission to Moscow

Dear Friend,

From March 22-30, sixteen Jewish students from Moscow universities and Stanford University joined together for an eight-day Student Leadership Program in Moscow. Modeled on our previous successful programs in Moscow and Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, NCSJ organized the 2009 program in conjunction with Hillel at Stanford University and Moscow Hillel, and received funding from the Koret Foundation, Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, and the Jewish Community Endowment Fund of the San Francisco Federation.

The program paired American and Russian students as roommates for the week and provided them with an intensive schedule of meetings and experiences. Our focus was on understanding the Jewish community in Russia today, the role the American and Russian Jewish communities can play in developing civil society, and the importance of Klal Israel (worldwide Jewry).

We met NCSJ leaders, officials from the Russian Foreign Ministry, the American and Israeli Embassies, and reporters from Echo Moskvy Radio, NBC and JTA in Moscow. Our meetings and discussions covered media freedom with Russian and American journalists, anti-Semitism with monitors of anti-Semitism, U.S.-Russia relations with American and government officials, community development with Moscow philanthropists, education with Jewish day school educators, and Jewish identity, heritage, and human rights in group sessions led by NCSJ.

The group met with a broad range of Russian Jewish leadership as well, including Chief Rabbis Berel Lazar and Adolph Shayevich, and Chief Progressive Rabbi Alexander Lyskovoy; Yuri Kanner, the newly-elected President of the Russian Jewish Congress; and representatives from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, Genesis Philanthropy Group, Jewish Agency for Israel, Project Keshet, and the World Congress of Russian Jewry.

Our group also visited the Moscow Jewish Children's Home, where we brought books and games and listened to musical performances. In the coming weeks, I will share with you some of the students' reflections on their experiences.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lesley Weiss'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lesley Weiss

NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. April 17, 2009

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## #1a

### **Russia: Ministry of Justice Approves Restrictive Religion Council Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, April 8, 2009**

MOSCOW - Patriarch Kirill's support for what he calls "the traditional religions of Russia" - Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism - against all others has been institutionalized at the Russian justice ministry

with the selection of a specialist notorious for his hostility toward Roman Catholics, Protestant Evangelicals, and other groups, to head a new religious council, the Georgian Daily reported on April 4. On April 3, the justice ministry's experts council charged with providing guidance on religious questions to Russian courts and other bodies met for the first time in Moscow and in "a unanimous decision" chose Aleksandr Dvorkin, who describes himself as a specialist on "sectology," as council head. The newly constituted council includes representatives of Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, as well as civil specialists on relations between church and state, new religious movements and "pseudo-religious criminal and extremist structures." The inclusion of representatives from these four faiths but from no others is a victory for Kirill, who has been pushing the concept of "traditional religions" of Russia since the late 1990s, but the installation of Dvorkin is even more disturbing given his attacks on other religions and his extremely restrictive view on just what religious organizations should be permitted in Russia.

#### **#1b**

#### **Georgian, Ukrainian officials seeking assurances from Obama administration on Russia**

**AP, April 15, 2009**

WASHINGTON - Georgian and Ukrainian officials are seeking assurances from the Obama administration that they will not lose out as the United States seeks greater cooperation from Russia.

Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze has met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, while Georgian Secretary of National Security and Defense Raisa Bogatyreva has met other top administration officials. The two visiting officials said Tuesday they discussed documents signed during the final months of the Bush administration that outlined ways to deepen cooperation with the United States.

The meetings follow efforts by the Obama administration to improve Russian relations after years of tensions that peaked after Russia's invasion of Georgia in August.

#### **#1c**

#### **Georgia expects to receive \$242.5 mln in U.S. assistance soon**

**Interfax, April 14, 2009**

TBILISI- The U.S. could allocate \$242.5 million in financial assistance to Georgia in the near future, Georgian Prime Minister Nika Gilauri said at a government meeting on Tuesday.

"The issue is already being examined in U.S. Congress and presumably this latest package of financial aid will be approved in the near future," he said.

Specific areas that will receive the funds have already been designated. "In particular, \$133.5 million is earmarked for various economic and infrastructure projects, \$68.5 million will be used to improve living conditions for refugees from Abkhazia, \$20.5 million will go to law enforcement agencies and \$20 million to conduct training to improve self-rule," Gilauri said.

It was reported earlier that 22 donor countries pledged in October 2008 to provide \$4.5 billion to Georgia over three years, including \$1 billion from the U.S., of which Georgia has already received \$400 million. The funds will be used mainly to support the budget and also to finance humanitarian assistance projects and to renovate roads and municipal infrastructure.

#### **#1d**

#### **Work of NGOs frequently restricted in Russia without reason – Medvedev**

**Interfax, April 15, 2009**

MOSCOW- There are "a large number" of situations in which the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Russia are restricted groundlessly, President Dmitry Medvedev said.

"It is clear that it is difficult for you to work. There are a large number of instances in which the functioning of non-governmental organizations is restricted without any sufficient reason," Medvedev told a session of the presidential council to support the development of civil society institutions and human rights in the Kremlin on Wednesday.

"It is certainly caused by the fact that many civil servants view the activities of non-commercial and non-governmental organizations as a threat to their single-handed rule. The same situation probably exists in other countries as well. But, as far as this issue is concerned, we have our own quite cumbersome historical traditions, which continue to actively influence relations between the authorities and civil society, as well as the authorities and non-governmental organizations today," the president said.

"It is not a secret that the idea of human rights activity is seriously distorted in our country. It stems from our history and certain ideological foundations. One needs to understand one simple thing: the state itself and people who are interested in it should be responsible for protecting rights," he said.

## **#1e**

### **Russians Increasingly Complain Of Police, Court Violations Interfax-AVN, April 16, 2009**

MOSCOW- The Russian human rights ombudsman has received an increasing number of complaints about police actions and violations of political rights, says an ombudsman report posted on his website.

"The number of complaints about violations of constitutional rights by police officers has grown to 16.9% this year," the report runs.

Complaints about court actions, unfounded prosecution, denied opening of criminal cases, violations in the fulfillment of court orders and unlawful periods of custody amounted to 27.3% in that category, the ombudsman said.

"The number of complaints about violations of political rights increased from 3.2% to 4.1% (1,118) in 2008," the report runs.

The largest number of complaints about political right violations (45.9%) was related to rallies, marches, other public actions, activities of political parties, the media, the freedom of speech and other aspects of political activities.

Meanwhile, the number of complaints from refugees, displaced persons, migrants and Russian citizens residing abroad concerning citizenship problems and violations in the issue of passports and temporary registration permits has declined.

The same is true about complaints about violations of social and pension rights.

## **#2**

### **Moldovan government attacking journalists, reporter says By Mayra Cuevas-Nazario CNN, April 10, 2009**

Alina Radu's newsroom in Moldova has turned into an impromptu safehouse for local journalists, as their attempts to cover massive anti-government protests this week have put them in danger in the former Soviet state.

Radu, director of the Moldova's weekly newspaper, Ziarul de Garda, told CNN Friday that attacks from authorities against journalists are the worst she has seen in her 20 years of experience as a journalist.

She said more than 10 reporters were huddled in her newsroom, afraid to return home.

"A lot of journalists have been arrested," including Rodica Mahu, editor-in-chief of Jurnal de Chisinau, based in the capital, Radu told CNN in a phone interview Friday.

Mahu was released after two hours of questioning, but whether she would be charged with any offense was unclear.

"They accused me of preparing an armed attack and that my fingerprints were found on the stones that were thrown at the parliament building and the president's office," Mahu, referring to events Tuesday, told CNN late Friday over the phone from her office at Jurnal de Chisinau.

Mahu said she was detained after police watched her dictate details about a small demonstration at a Cabinet building in the morning. "I told them I was just doing my job as a journalist," she said.

"It is not normal that (a) journalist go missing in Moldova," she added.

Authorities began harassing journalists Thursday, when four journalists covering the arrests of protesters were attacked and their cameras destroyed, Radu said. [Photolimages from the protests »](#)

The journalists have been reporting on the demonstrators -- many of them students -- protesting Sunday's election results, which sparked violent riots in the capital, Chisinau.

The demonstrators claim the ruling Communist Party manipulated the results to make it appear that it had won 50 percent of the vote. A 50 percent majority would allow the party to select a new president and amend the Constitution.

On Friday, Voronin gave in to the protesters' demand for a full recount of the election results.

"The president wants to destroy any kind of democracy. He wants to control the minds and activities of everyone," said Radu. "My parents had seen this situation when Stalin was in power. This is a repetition."

Demonstrators turned out in unexpected numbers Wednesday, multiplied by social-networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook. An estimated 10,000 gathered Tuesday, a spontaneous mob called out to the central square in Chisinau. That followed protests on Monday that were peaceful.

For international journalists attempting to enter the country, the situation has been discouraging.

Reporters Without Borders, a journalism advocacy group, reported that 18 Romanian journalists working for local and international media outlets -- including Agence France-Presse, Associated Press and Reuters -- were denied access to Moldova.

"We condemn this unfair and dangerous decision by the Moldovan authorities," Reporters Without Borders said in a statement. "It not only hampers proper media coverage of what is taking place but it also exacerbates the tension between Moldova and Romania, fueling a nationalistic and aggressive discourse that could destabilize the situation even further."

### **#3**

#### **Federation's overseas agencies not immune to economic crisis Jewish Community Voice (Southern NJ), April 8, 2009**

As much as the South Jersey Jewish community is suffering from the economic downturn striking the United States, the Jewish community in Israel and the former Soviet Union (FSU) are faring far worse, according to representatives from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and other international partners.

During a recent conference call with the Federations of North America, Prof. Jack Habib projected that by the end of this year, the needs in Israel will increase substantially. Habib is the Director of the Myers- JDC-Brookdale Institute, which is the leading center for applied social research serving Israel and the Jewish world.

An 8% unemployment rate in Israel is projected for 2009, according to Habib, as well as lower wages for those already employed and further cutbacks for lower wage industries.

Reports from the Jewish Agency for Israel show over 700,000 children living below the poverty in Israel with 100,000 of them going to bed hungry every night. Increasing needs across the entire social services sector in Israel is coupled with a dramatic decline in charitable dollars from both American and Israeli donors, according to Habib. The result is an ever-widening gap between the number of people needing assistance and the available resources to meet their needs.

A more desperate situation exists in the former Soviet Union, reports Mark B. Levin, executive director of the National Council of Soviet Jewry (NCSJ). Levin is one of the organized Jewish community's leading experts on national and international political and legislative issues.

The Jews in the former Soviet Union are in dire need of social services, he reported.

They are not only receiving fewer dollars from the North American Jewish community, they are also receiving fewer aid dollars from Russian Jewish oligarchs, reports Levin. Vital Jewish services such as Jewish schools, Hesed (welfare) centers, and programs for the homebound elderly are receiving less support and are at risk of being eliminated.

JDC is currently able to assist only 170,000 Jewish elderly in the former Soviet Union. Medical and homecare needs have been especially hard hit. One heart-wrenching example is the availability of products for incontinent Jewish seniors.

Prior to the economic downturn, funding was available for seven adult diapers per week per senior. With today's decreased funding, that number is down to three diapers per week.

JDC and JAFI receive a total of nearly \$1 million each year from the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey's annual campaign to support a wide range of social service, educational and humanitarian programs in Israel, the FSU and 60 countries worldwide. Increased and new contributions to the 2009 annual campaign are critically needed to insure this continued funding to our overseas partners, as well as to the many local agencies and organizations supported by Federation.

#### **#4**

#### **NATO Struggles With Conflicting Views on Russia**

**By Steven Erlanger**

**New York Times, April 10, 2009**

PARIS — NATO leaders spent a great deal of time at their 60th anniversary summit meeting last weekend trying to overcome Turkish opposition to a new secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who will take charge of the alliance in August. But little time was spent on the more important issue of the Russian bear, sitting outside the room.

In the group's "Declaration on Alliance Security," issued on Saturday as a blueprint for rethinking NATO for a new century, there is only one paragraph on Russia, which describes the status quo and states empty, "We stand ready to work with Russia to address the common challenges we face."

The Obama administration talks of pressing the "reset button" with Russia, but NATO remains sharply split over how quickly to get back to normal business with a Moscow that seems to be an aggressive outlier, refusing to retreat from occupied parts of Georgia, intimidating opposition figures and breaking up protests,

complaining about the current security structure of Europe and using its enormous gas supplies as a political weapon against a NATO aspirant, Ukraine.

“It is no secret that when it comes to Russia, there are a wide range of views within NATO, from the very cautious to the forward-leaning,” said Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the current secretary general. “Until we narrow that range it will be difficult to engage Russia effectively.”

But Russia, too, he continued, “needs to decide whether it recognizes NATO’s desire for partnership, or whether it will continue to look at NATO through the prism of a cold war that is long behind us.”

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer put in the nicest terms NATO’s contradictory positions toward Russia. Organized as a bulwark against Soviet expansion in Europe, NATO did not disband at 40, when the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union soon followed. Instead, NATO expanded to the former Soviet-bloc countries of Eastern Europe and beyond, to include the Baltic nations, which Moscow had annexed, and it now wants to expand into the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia.

In a recent article in the journal *The National Interest*, Richard K. Betts of the Council on Foreign Relations and Columbia University describes NATO’s own identity crisis, with three competing functions and self-images: first, “the enforcer, the pacifier of conflicts beyond the region’s borders;” second, “the gentleman’s club for liberal and liberalizing countries of the West;” and “the third is the residual function of an anti-Russia alliance.”

Mr. Betts compares NATO’s personality disorder to the film “*The Three Faces of Eve*,” and calls it “a potentially corrosive mix, particularly as they relate to Russia,” with the potential to further divide the United States from its European allies. While former Soviet-bloc states are much more wary of Moscow, “old Europe” is more sanguine — and both are dependent on Russian energy, especially natural gas.

The European Union is vital for Russia, too. It accounts for roughly half of Russia’s two-way trade and 80 percent of its exports, while providing 75 percent of foreign investment, according to figures cited at a Berlin conference of the American Council on Germany and the German Council on Foreign Affairs.

Russia has responded with a mixture of bluster and, lately, some conciliatory words. Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin has described the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, and President Dmitri A. Medvedev has insisted that Russia reserves “a zone of privileged interests” covering the post-Soviet space. But a Russia badly hit by the economic crisis has welcomed President Obama’s change of tone.

“Atmospherics help, and the noises are better now than for a long time,” said Andrew C. Kuchins, director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, pointing to an agreement to negotiate on the most concrete and easiest problem between Washington and Moscow: strategic arms reduction, which could lead to more complicated conversations on missile defense and especially Iran.

Still, Mr. Kuchins noted, Russia is pressing for fundamental change in Europe. It has called for a new “security architecture” to replace NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, both of which it labels relics of the cold war.

Russia wants at least a reshaping of the O.S.C.E. and is blocking other international organizations, like the European Court of Human Rights, all of which Moscow considers to be biased in applying standards of human rights and democracy.

Some European nations, like Poland and other former members of the Soviet bloc, think Moscow, having digested parts of Georgia, is simply trying a traditional game of playing European countries against one another and dividing Europe from Washington, while some countries, like France, Germany and Italy, think that Russia’s ideas should be explored. And as usual, many Europeans fear that Mr. Obama and Washington will drive the relationship with little reference to Europe.

Ivan Soltanovskiy, Russia's deputy ambassador to NATO, said the West should not overreact. "There is a new sense of self-assurance in Russia, but don't confuse it with aggressive nationalism," he said. "We see in the West a lot of mistrust of my country. But this is a self-confident Russia open to negotiation."

The Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said in a speech at the German Marshall Fund's Brussels Forum last month that "NATO is not just threatening Russia." Its new security agenda, he said, includes "more and more scenarios where force could be used, not necessarily with the sanction of the United Nations."

Russia wants "fairness," Mr. Lavrov insisted. "We just don't understand why NATO is expanding. We don't understand why this military infrastructure is being moved to our borders."

Russia has no interest in joining NATO, he said. Still, Russia regards NATO as a reality and wants to cooperate with it, he said, in "Afghanistan, joint control of the airspace, quite a number of things, compatibility of peace-keeping forces, a lot."

On Saturday, NATO leaders agreed, as expected, to resume regular meetings of the NATO-Russia Council, the talking shop set up in 2002 that satisfies neither side. Meetings were suspended after the brief Georgia-Russia war last August; they will restart despite the occupation of the breakaway Georgian enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

But the Russians have recently proposed two substantive topics to discuss in the council, a senior European official said. The first, Georgia, was rejected by NATO, but the second, Afghanistan, is promising, the official said. Already, Moscow has agreed to let Germany resupply its NATO troops in Afghanistan by rail through Russia.

And as for Russian ideas about a new security architecture, there seems to be little substance. "After asking Moscow for two months, we got back two and a half pages of old language," the official said. "We're happy with the security architecture as it is. But if a major partner, Russia, has a problem, we can discuss it."

## **#5**

### **Europe's Next Revolution?**

**By Andrew Wilson**

**New York Times, April 9, 2009**

The demonstrations in the Moldovan capital of Chisinau after last Sunday's elections are not like Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" in 2004. Most obviously, they have been far from peaceful. Nor have they been provoked by incontrovertible evidence of massive voting fraud. The demonstrators just don't like the governing party: Moldova is the only European country where a nominally "Communist" party has won largely free and fair elections, in 2001 and 2005.

So why the protests? The Communists fought dirty in the campaign, but not as dirty as others in the region. Regional TV was harassed, but the main national opposition channel stayed open. Businesses were pressured to sever ties with the opposition and the president reminded voters none too subtly who would pay for their new schools. Nothing was done to make voting easier for the hundreds of thousands of Moldovans abroad, who were less likely to vote for the Communists.

But Moldova is still a relatively open country. Its people have access to Romanian, Ukrainian and Russian mass media. There is no single economic player of which ownership would effectively grant control of the whole country — like Gazprom in Russia. In 2007, 51 percent of Moldovan exports went to the E.U. and only 17 percent to Russia. Even Transnistria, a major producer of steel and cement, trades mainly with Europe.

So the Communists may have padded the result. The official exit poll gave them 45 percent of the vote and they claimed exactly 50 percent — compared with 46 percent in 2005 and less than 40 percent in local elections in 2007. But the result was not a total steal. The main opposition parties, the pro-European Liberals

and Liberal-Democrats, only won around 13 percent each, and the “Our Moldova” alliance just under 10 percent.

But the Communists need 61 out of the 101 seats to elect the next president and other officials. Their leader, President Vladimir Voronin, has served his maximum two terms: The most likely outcome is for him to become chairman of Parliament and for Moldova to “rediscover” that it is actually a parliamentary republic.

Funnily enough, the Communists are forecast to get exactly 61 seats. In 2005 they had to make an alliance with the Christian Democrats — who suffered in the long-term, losing their traditional pro-Romanian electorate and ending up with only 3 percent of the vote. This time, the Communists will not need to make alliances: They can easily pick off one or two businessmen from the other three parties’ lists.

A second reason for the protests has been the Communists’ flirtation with Russia. Moldova’s foreign policy has swung back and forth in recent years, but Voronin has conducted a largely pro-E.U. course since 2003. Yet in a close contest this time, he relied heavily on Moscow as an election resource.

This trend could well continue. Russia is seeking to settle the dispute with the separatist “Transnistrian Republic” on its own terms. It is also seeking to buy up assets such as power plants in Chisinau and Balti, which now look relatively cheap.

A third factor is that Moldova is yet another country facing economic crisis. It has artificially prolonged a boom in local consumption through the April elections, financed by external remittances from as many as 500,000 Moldovans working in the E.U. and 344,000 in Russia — sums that once comprised a third of GDP. Mr. Voronin’s circle takes a cut on imports and on construction fueled by remittances — and so has tried to keep the cycle going for more than the usual electoral reasons. But imports are now three times exports and customs duties make up 70 percent of budget revenues. A crunch is coming.

When it does, the E.U. has a number of cards to play. Visas are a huge issue for Moldovans working legally or illegally in the E.U. The E.U. Border Monitoring Mission has helped cut down on corruption and the trafficking of people and drugs through Transnistria. Moldova may soon have to go cap-in-hand to the I.M.F.

Moldova may be a small country, but it is one of the region’s few democracies. And it is symptomatic of a broader trend. In the global economic crisis there is a real risk of the E.U. stepping back from the “eastern neighborhood” as it plunges into ever deeper crises. Russia, on the other hand, does not fall back on utilitarian thinking in times of crisis. It is investing to win influence in the future.

*Andrew Wilson is a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.*

## **#6**

### **Taking the Bang Out of Nuclear Weapons**

**By Daryl G. Kimball**

**Moscow Times, April 13, 2009**

In a stirring speech delivered in Prague a week ago, U.S. President Barack Obama outlined his vision for strengthening global efforts to curb the spread of nuclear weapons, moving forward on long-overdue disarmament measures and preventing nuclear terrorism. Most important, he articulated “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”

Obama’s speech signals a fundamental and important transformation in U.S. thinking about nuclear weapons. He is not simply pledging to “pursue” nuclear disarmament, as past U.S. presidents have done regularly since Lyndon Johnson, but to make the elimination of all the world’s nuclear weapons a central goal of U.S. nuclear policy.

Days earlier in their joint statement issued in London, President Dmitry Medvedev joined Obama in committing "to achieve a nuclear-free world while recognizing that this long-term goal will require a new emphasis on arms control and conflict-resolution measures and their full implementation by all concerned nations."

In the near term, Obama pledged that he will start the U.S. nuclear policy by negotiating with Russia on a new treaty by the end of this year that would dramatically cut U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals -- which still number about 2,000 to 2,500 that are deployed by each side.

That negotiation will be tough, but it is necessary given that the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, expires on Dec. 5. The two sides will likely set lower limits on deployed strategic warheads -- to 1,500 or below on each side -- and the missiles and bombers used to deliver them. This will be accompanied by streamlined verification and monitoring provisions similar to the ones that are stipulated in START.

Obama and Medvedev also pledged to seek a new treaty to end the production of fissile materials that are intended for nuclear weapons. In addition, both sides expressed their commitment to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which requires ratification by the U.S. Senate and eight other countries.

These are all practical, overdue steps that would strengthen international security, especially the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. By banning the "bang," the test ban treaty makes it harder for nations already possessing nuclear weapons to field new, more sophisticated nuclear warheads. For instance, without additional testing, China cannot perfect the technology to arm its missiles with multiple warheads.

Given the existing U.S. and Chinese nuclear test moratoria and 1996 decision to sign the test ban treaty, Washington and Beijing bear most of the treaty-related responsibilities. Yet their failure to ratify it diminishes their ability to prod other nations to join the treaty, refrain from testing and improve capabilities to detect and deter clandestine testing.

At the same time, there is neither the need nor any political support for renewed U.S. testing for new nuclear warhead design purposes. The United States stopped testing in 1992, but since technical advances in the U.S. stockpile stewardship program have increased confidence in the reliability of the existing arsenal, Obama has pledged "not to authorize the development of new nuclear weapons." With consistent and smart presidential leadership, securing the Democrat-controlled Senate support for U.S. ratification of the test ban treaty before the end of 2010 is clearly within Obama's reach.

In Prague, Obama also said that "to put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and urge others to do the same." That's a hint that significant changes will emerge from the nuclear posture review that is due at the end of this year.

Obama may decide that the only purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter their use and that they should never be used or threatened to counter conventional attacks. Given that no other state possesses more than 300 nuclear bombs, that simple shift in U.S. nuclear strategy would facilitate far deeper reductions in U.S. and Russian arsenals -- to 1,000 total nuclear warheads each in the next five years -- and open a path for multilateral disarmament talks involving other nuclear-armed states.

To get to that point, however, Russia (as well as other members of the nuclear club) must also be willing to adjust their thinking and policies regarding nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has increased the emphasis on nuclear weapons in its security strategy as a hedge against the eastward expansion of NATO, the 200 remaining U.S. tactical warheads stored in six NATO countries and China's small nuclear arsenal. This has led Russia to hold on to its sizable arsenal of tactical nuclear warheads, which independent experts estimate to be as high as 8,000.

In reality, the overwhelming destructive power of these weapons make them inappropriate for use in conflicts with non-nuclear adversaries, and Russia's formidable strategic nuclear arsenal is more than sufficient to deter an attack from any potential nuclear-armed adversary. NATO countries and Russia should agree to put tactical nuclear weapons on the negotiating table and begin a process of accounting for and eventually dismantling these obsolete systems.

Agreement on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear reductions well below 1,500 warheads for each side will be difficult as long as Russia is concerned about the possible deployment of U.S. missile defense interceptors in Central Europe. While Obama said he will go forward with a missile defense system that is "cost-effective and proven" to deal with missile threats that might emerge from North Korea and Iran, the potential interceptor system in Poland hasn't even been tested, much less proven. Given that it cannot be deployed for two to three years even if Obama seeks to do so, Washington and Moscow have time to work out a cooperative approach or agree to limits on the deployment of a missile defense system in Europe.

While the cynics and supporters of the nuclear status quo believe action toward a world free of nuclear weapons is an exercise in wishful thinking, they're wrong. The real fantasy is to expect better U.S.-Russian relations and a greater commitment to nonproliferation from other states without bold action on disarmament through a revitalized arms control framework.

*Daryl G. Kimball is executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington.*

## **#7**

### **Russia's Nuclear Dilemma**

**By Brian Whitmore**

**RFE/RL, April 15, 2009**

It has been conventional wisdom of late that Russia has been much more interested in nuclear arms reduction than the United States.

With its nuclear stockpiles aging, Russia has long been eager to revive arms-control negotiations with the Washington.

Moreover, many analysts have pointed out that arms control treaties, with their echoes of Cold War-era superpower summitry, are psychologically important to the Kremlin because they place Russia on equal international footing with the United States.

When U.S. President Barack Obama and Kremlin leader Dmitry Medvedev agreed at their recent meeting in London to negotiate a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty by the end of the year, Russian officials broadly welcomed the move.

But in his speech in Prague on April 5, Obama put forth a vision of a nuclear free world. The goal is long-term to be sure, but it was the clearest signal yet that the White House intends to seek the deepest possible cuts in the Russian and American arsenals. And this has some Russian defense experts nervous.

In an article in today's issue of "Kommersant," Sergei Rogov, director, USA and Canada Institute argues that the closer we get to nuclear disarmament, the more the balance of power tips to the United States:

"In recent years, however, the USA has increased its superiority in conventional weapons - high-precision non-nuclear systems capable of hitting almost any target, including targets that used to be vulnerable to nuclear weapons only. In a nuclear-free world the United States would have absolute military superiority."

This is a complete reversal of the situation during the Cold War, when the United States was reluctant to remove nuclear arms from Europe due to the Soviet Union's conventional superiority on the continent.

Rogov argues that now, nuclear disarmament would leave Russia excessively vulnerable:

"Russia is lagging far behind the U.S.A. in deploying state-of-the-art high-precision conventional weaponry; it regards nuclear weapons as a means of deterring not only a nuclear war, but also a large-scale conventional war."

Be careful what you wish for.

**#8**

**Russia, U.S. Can't Afford False Start in Relations, Lavrov Says**

**By Lyubov Pronina**

**Bloomberg, April 11, 2009**

Russia and the U.S. cannot allow another "false start" in relations after their presidents agreed this month to improve ties that had sunk to a Cold-War low, Russia's foreign minister said.

"Mutual understanding was undermined long ago and it will take time to restore it," Sergei Lavrov said at a roundtable discussion on foreign policy outside Moscow today broadcast on state television. Still, "we are moving in the right direction," he said.

Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev agreed to replace an existing arms-control treaty with a new accord, setting aside "cold war mentalities," at a London meeting on April 1. The countries are rebuilding relations after George W. Bush's promotion of a missile shield in Europe and Russia's rout of Georgia's U.S.-trained army in August.

The U.S. and Russia are also seeking common ground on Iran's nuclear program and the possible expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine. Russia opposes eastward enlargement, while the U.S. has criticized Russia's construction of a nuclear power plant in Iran.

Lavrov reiterated Russia's position there could be no "quid pro quo" in relations between the two countries.

"We think that that any trade-offs would be unprincipled and unrealistic, they would undermine trust in our diplomacy," said the minister, who is a former envoy to the United Nations in New York.

Lavrov also ruled out Russia's becoming a member of NATO now, saying that it remains to be seen how the 28-member alliance may be reformed.

"I don't think that Russia can enter NATO in its present form," he said.

**#9**

**Party Ends for Russian Rich After \$230 Billion Losses**

**By Anastasia Ustinova**

**Bloomberg, April 8, 2009**

Champagne and caviar are out in Moscow, and vodka and pelmeni dumplings are back in.

Rich Russians, stung by the end of the biggest economic boom in their history, are tempering the opulent lifestyles that made the city of 10 million the bling capital of Europe.

Demand for private jets and \$500,000-a-week yachts has collapsed, while a survey by restaurant consulting group Restcon found revenue at high-end eateries has halved. Luxury-clothing boutiques selling brands such as Alexander McQueen and Stella McCartney are closing down.

"A new lifestyle mentality is taking shape," said Roman Trotsenko, 38, the millionaire founder of airport builder Novaport. "People aren't really in the mood to party."

Moscow had 74 billionaires a year ago, more than any other city in the world. Now it has 27, according to Forbes magazine. The 25 richest Russians lost a combined \$230 billion during six months last year as the value of their companies plunged along with commodity prices, according to Bloomberg calculations.

The government expects the economy to shrink 2.2 percent this year after expanding about 7 percent a year since 1999. Unemployment is at a four-year high of 8.5 percent. The proportion of people who consider themselves “poor” has doubled to 14 percent in the past year, according to the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion in Moscow.

“You just can’t party when others are starving,” said Boris Teterev, president of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Moscow, which opened in 2004 to cater to Moscow’s nouveau riche.

#### ‘Spending Isn’t Fashionable’

Trotsenko said Russians are increasingly spending more time with their families, on trips to theaters and museums and “home parties” with vodka and pelmeni.

Conspicuous consumption was socially acceptable during the boom, when unemployment was falling and wages were rising, said Trotsenko, who is worth \$70 million, according to Finans magazine, a Russian competitor of Forbes.

Teterev, 55, who has a personal fortune of \$200 million, according to Finans, envisages Rolls-Royce sales will fall by as much as a third this year. That’s about twice the rate of decline that Milan-based industry group Altagamma predicts for Russia’s \$5.7 billion luxury market as a whole.

“Spending just isn’t fashionable anymore,” said Kirill Shishkov, co-owner at Teorema Holdings, which develops residential and commercial property in St. Petersburg.

Shishkov, 37, who spoke by mobile phone en route to the Swiss Alps, also is among the 400 Russians who are worth at least 2 billion rubles (\$60 million) each, according to Finans.

#### ‘Moral Debts’

While part of the change in spending behavior is due to shrinking fortunes, politics is playing a role, said Alexander Dobrovinsky, a corporate and divorce lawyer whose clients have included the ex-wife of billionaire Alexei Mordashov, 43, chief executive officer of steelmaker OAO Severstal.

Many oligarchs are seeking state protection from Western creditors and don’t want to irritate the Kremlin with outlandish behavior at a time when the government has declared social spending its top priority, Dobrovinsky said.

“The private jets are still there, but the names of the owners have been scratched off,” said Dobrovinsky.

President Dmitry Medvedev spelled it out last month, saying the wealthiest Russians need to focus more on their businesses and less on personal spending to help the country weather the worst economic crisis in a decade.

“People became very wealthy in a very short time,” Medvedev, 43, a lawyer by training, said in a March 15 television interview. “Now it’s time to repay debts, moral debts, because this crisis is a test of maturity.”

#### ‘Anti-Glamour’

Medvedev was voicing support for what state television and talk radio call the “anti-glamour revolution.”

Alexander Lebedev, 49, said many of his fellow billionaires “accumulated huge debt buying all those mega-yachts and private jets” and will struggle to pay it back. “Medvedev is not going to reeducate them, but real life will,” said Lebedev, whose assets, including 29 percent of airline OAO Aeroflot, are worth \$1.9 billion, according to Finans.

A lot of the decline in spending is simply down to image, said Teterev at Rolls Royce. "People who lost their money now pretend it's trendy, but if you have resources, you will never get rid of your driver or your cleaning staff," he said.

There's also evidence the Russian party is just moving elsewhere, away from the Kremlin's gaze.

"We're sold out this season," said Alexi Usati, owner of Retrohunt, a Namibian company that offers Russian clients "hunting and safari adventures" for \$150,000 each.

'Fast, Slick, Cheap'

There's no sign of crisis, either, at Most, a French restaurant a block from Red Square that recently charged a couple \$16,000 for dinner. "Our guests are used to this lifestyle," General Manager Mikhail Dolgi said.

Moscow authorities last month allowed dozens of people to demonstrate downtown against ostentatious spending, with placards saying, "Glamour is a party during the plague."

"The glamour lifestyle is promoted by those who agree with the pro-American lifestyle and want to destabilize our society during these difficult times," said Alexander Bovdunov, a spokesman for Eurasia Youth Union, which organized the event.

In February, Medvedev banned his staff from vacationing abroad without permission after three Kremlin officials were spotted partying in the glitzy French ski resort of Courchevel, according to the Kommersant newspaper.

Mikhail Prokhorov, then CEO of OAO GMK Norilsk Nickel, embarrassed the Kremlin two years ago by flying in a planeload of women for a private party and getting arrested on suspicion of pimping. He was cleared of any wrongdoing because the judge ruled there wasn't enough evidence.

Prokhorov, 43, now Russia's richest man, appears to have gotten the message and is even leading the charge against the same opulence he displayed in Courchevel.

Snob, his lifestyle magazine for jetsetters, last month declared the new motto for Moscow: "Fast, Slick and Cheap." Snob told its readers that "saving money is the trendiest thing to do at the moment."

## **#10**

### **Georgia protesters intensify push to oust president**

**By Matt Robinson and Margarita Antidze**

**Reuters, April 13, 2009**

TBILISI - Georgian opposition leaders said on Monday they would move daily street protests to President Mikheil Saakashvili's office as they fought to maintain momentum in a campaign to force his resignation.

Some 20,000 people demonstrated on Monday outside parliament in the former Soviet republic, the fifth day of their protest.

The opposition leaders said they would keep up continuous protests until Saakashvili quit over his record on democracy and last year's disastrous war with Russia.

"That way he will hear our voices much more loudly," said Kakha Kukava, one of more than a dozen opposition leaders taking part in the campaign.

Turnout dipped over the weekend and there were signs that some opposition leaders were looking to hold talks with the president on finding a way out of the stand-off.

Some 60,000 people rallied at the start of the campaign on Thursday, followed by 20,000 on Friday, blocking Tbilisi's central avenue and the main roads running past the president's office and the public broadcaster.

Critics accuse Saakashvili, who came to power on the back of the 2003 Rose Revolution, of monopolizing power and exerting pressure on the judiciary and the media.

Last year's war, when Russia crushed a Georgian assault on breakaway South Ossetia, has emboldened opponents who say the 41-year-old leader has made too many mistakes to remain in power until 2013.

But analysts doubt the opposition can remain united or muster the numbers over a sustained period to force him out. Despite the defection of some senior allies and repeated cabinet reshuffles since the war, Saakashvili's position appears to remain strong.

The West, which receives oil via Georgia from the Caspian Sea, is watching the situation closely. In November 2007, police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the last peaceful mass demonstrations against Saakashvili.

Diplomats say a protracted stand-off risks sparking unrest.

The European Union's special envoy for the South Caucasus, Peter Semneby, has been trying to broker a dialogue but opposition leaders have sent mixed signals about their readiness to talk.

"People like Semneby have been talking to them," a senior government source told Reuters. "There are stirrings, but they haven't settled on anything yet."

## **#11**

### **Latvia faces tough tasks in post-boom hangover**

**AFP, April 12, 2009**

RIGA — As it wrestles with a snowballing economic crisis and tries to stick to the terms of an IMF bailout, the Latvia government is facing deep public anger over mismanagement during the Baltic state's boom years.

"Governments simply stuffed their pockets with money when the times were good," said Nina Bazhenova, an English teacher at a Riga school, expressing views that have driven thousands of people to join street protests.

"Their awful investments and plain stupidity led us to this," she told AFP.

More than 10,000 teachers flooded central Riga on April 2, protesting against impending wage cuts as the government scrambled to get a slice of the 7.5-billion-euro bailout it won from the International Monetary Fund and other lenders in December.

Labour unions across the economy have threatened more protests.

Under the package, the Latvian government has to slash spending to try to bridge a yawning deficit. It has already made deep cuts that, along with those on the horizon, could mean spending 12 percent less than planned this year.

"It is very difficult to do and it is very unusual," said Morten Hansen, a professor at the Riga branch of the Stockholm School of Economics.

On April 2, the government announced it had missed out on a 200-million-euro tranche from the IMF. The lender acted after Riga failed to amend its budget in time -- leading to speculation that the bailout could unravel.

"This is a 'chase your shadow' case, since as you cut, so the economy contracts more, so the more you need to cut," economist Edward Hugh told AFP.

Centre-right Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis has warned that Riga could go bankrupt in June if it fails to receive the promised cash. He has so far been unable to persuade lenders to grant him some leeway.

Dombrovskis came to power in March, after his predecessor Ivars Godmanis quit following violent demonstrations in January and a rebellion within his coalition -- nothing unusual in a country that has had 15 governments since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Although the economic crisis has swept across Europe, no other country in the European Union has seen such a heavy hangover after an economic party as Latvia.

The nation of just 2.3 million people, which joined the EU in 2004, enjoyed table-topping growth rates of 11.9 percent in 2006 and 10.2 percent in 2007 as rising wages, easy credit and a property boom stoked domestic consumption.

But it also notched up huge current-account deficits and faced double-digit inflation, falling into recession in 2008 as output slumped 4.6 percent. The government forecasts that the economy will shrink 13.0 percent this year.

Latvia's previous governments, notably that of centre-right politician Aigars Kalvitis who quit at the end of 2007, faced regular criticism for failing to heed warnings of overheating.

The policy tone was set in an August 2004 article by Ainars Slesers, then a government minister.

"One should quit warning about some kind of economic overheating. We ought to push the pedal to the metal," he wrote.

The pedal was slammed. From 2004 to 2007, nominal wages more than doubled while productivity slumped, helping drive up inflation, which in turn pushed up wages again.

Slesers also wrote that a "deficit-free budget is not an end in itself." Dombrovskis' predecessors failed to put aside boom-time funds for a rainy day.

Since 2004, the state has not run a single surplus, spending more than it takes in.

Finance ministry data showed a deficit of 1.0 percent of gross domestic product in 2004, 0.8 percent in 2005, 0.5 percent deficit in 2006 and 1.3 percent deficit in 2007.

When boom turned bust, the deficit spiralled to 3.2 percent in 2008.

Under the bailout, Riga pledged not to run a deficit more than 5.0 percent for 2009. Dombrovskis later failed to persuade lenders to allow 7.0 percent, but ratings agency Fitch has warned that it could balloon to 10.0 percent.

Einars Repse, who took over as finance minister last month, said he was "shocked" to discover that despite their alleged imprudence, his predecessors had failed to boost spending on the medical and education sectors and the police.

"That means something is indeed deeply wrong," he said.

With Latvians' trust in officials at its lowest ebb in years just as they are being asked to accept belt-tightening, tales of wasted money are grabbing headlines.

Last month the state auditor published a report on a bridge in Riga -- the nation's biggest infrastructure project since independence -- saying that at least 27 million lats (38 million euros, 51 million dollars) had been lost through shady tendering and double-dealing.

## **#12**

### **Medvedev: soaring Russian unemployment is alarming Reuters, April 14, 2009**

MOSCOW - President Dmitry Medvedev said Tuesday he was deeply alarmed by Russia's soaring unemployment, which he said was rising far faster than officials had forecast.

Russia's \$1.7 trillion economy is heading into recession and employers are slashing jobs as the economic crisis bites after a decade of explosive growth.

Medvedev, speaking to members of a think-tank that advises him on policies, said Russia had 2.2 million people officially registered as unemployed.

"We are deeply alarmed by the number of registered unemployed, which has already reached levels which we counted on reaching by year end," he said at a meeting with analysts from the Moscow-based Institute of Contemporary Development.

Medvedev is chairman of the board of trustees at the institute, some of whose researchers have criticized hardliners close to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

There was little sign of direct criticism Tuesday and Medvedev simply set out his concern about unemployment, which he said was about 8.5 percent of the economically active population, still lower than the 13.3 percent reached after Russia's 1998 economic crisis.

Russia's leaders are concerned that wage cuts and job losses could undermine the stability which former Kremlin chief Putin prided himself on achieving after the chaos of the 1990s.

Tatyana Maleva, an expert on social problems, told Medvedev that the crisis threatened a large group of Russians who are too poor to be seen as middle class but who are not classified as within the poorest 10 percent of the population.

She said about one fifth of Russia's population could be considered middle class. The Kremlin has said it will protect the middle class from the crisis as they are the natural supporters of Medvedev and Putin.

## **#13**

### **Georgia protests revive charges of foreign meddling Embattled President Saakashvili has accused Russians of financing a popular movement to oust him. By Fred Weir Christian Science Monitor, April 13, 2009**

A fresh cycle of "colored revolutions" appears to be shaking the former Soviet Union, and once again fingers are pointed all around at nefarious "foreign interests" aiming to profit from the turmoil.

Over the past week the post-Soviet states of Moldova and Georgia have both erupted in angry street protests aimed at overthrowing an elected government, which demonstrators claim came to power through fraud and seeks to impose a dictatorship.

It's not the first time for Georgia, which has regularly deposed every elected president since gaining independence from the USSR in 1991.

But Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who himself came to power in the “Rose Revolution” of 2003, sees a Russian conspiracy in the wave of street protests that have been rocking Tbilisi since last week.

Some 20,000 people gathered in Tbilisi’s main square Monday, for the fifth day running, to demand Mr. Saakashvili’s resignation.

“Most of the money [to finance the protests] comes from Russian oligarchs,” Saakashvili told Newsweek correspondent Anna Nemtsova over the weekend. “Whether the money is being sent from Russia under the supervision of the Russian government, that, I do not know.”

#### Russia rejects blame

Russia denies any involvement, and many Russian experts bristle at the suggestion that the Kremlin could be involved in Georgia’s internal politics.

“It’s foolish to blame Moscow of being behind these protests, only Saakashvili can possibly believe that,” says Mikhail Alexandrov, an expert with the Institute for Commonwealth of Independent States Studies, which is funded by the Russian government. “These protest leaders in Georgia are Saakashvili’s former comrades-in-arms and well-known pro-Western politicians.”

Similar allegations are flying in Moldova, where Communist President Vladimir Voronin says next-door Romania – a NATO member – orchestrated last week’s political rampage through the capital Chisinau by text-messaging and Twittering groups of youths challenging the validity of recent parliamentary elections. Mr. Voronin has defused the crisis for now, by agreeing to a full recount Wednesday.

#### Fingerpointing redux

If all the conflicting allegations of outside influence sound familiar, they ought to. When pro-Moscow regimes were overthrown in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) in very similar upheavals, the Kremlin loudly complained that Western governments were behind the revolts.

As the first wave of “colored revolutions” was breaking, many experts believed that many countries in the former Soviet Union, including Russia, were vulnerable to a sharp political shock delivered by democracy activists taking action in the streets.

In a 2006 meeting with Russian secret services, then-President Vladimir Putin urged them to be vigilant, especially concerning the activities of Western-funded nongovernmental organizations, to prevent “attempts by foreign states to use these organizations to interfere in Russia’s internal affairs.”

But an investigation by the Monitor at the time of Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution” found that while Western institutions were funding some Ukrainian NGOs that had programs in democracy education and civil society-building, there was no discernable evidence that they were subsidizing any subversive or politically partisan activities.

The continuing tendency among most political experts in Moscow is to view political turmoil in any far-flung corner of the former Soviet Union as a Western-orchestrated attempt to undermine Russian influence.

“Moldova was doomed to see an anti-Russian revolution, and an attempt at changing power was a matter of time and of a convenient occasion,” the daily Komsomolskaya Pravda editorialized after the riots in Chisinau last week.

“For the past few years the West kept poking a finger into Russia’s perimeter border to test if for reliability. The real aim of this is clear to all – surrounding Russia with a ring of states affiliated with the same military and political alliance [NATO],” it added.

#### Outside pressure vs. anger from within

Most experts say the tumult in the region is caused by internal pressures and part of the historical readjustment process for nations that were locked inside the USSR for 70 years.

“The reasons for these colored revolutions, whether successful or not, are purely internal,” says Alexander Iskanderyan, director of the independent Center for Caucasian Studies in Yerevan, Armenia. “Outside forces may be present, but they cannot initiate a revolt unless the local preconditions are already present.”

But others, such as the head of the Russian nationalist International Eurasian Movement, Alexander Dugin, argue that there’s a geopolitical war going on for dominance in the post-Soviet space, and that Russia is losing it.

“Russia doesn’t show any capacity to be an equal to the US in this battle,” Mr. Dugin says. He says that pro-Western groups, including disaffected young people and “globalist” NGOs, are employing the latest information technology to “network” and stage flash revolutions that have the potential to rapidly overwhelm legitimate but slow-moving established regimes.

“We are seeing just the first stage of these revolts,” he says “The whole world, including Russia, is becoming more vulnerable to this method of revolution. I think it will repeat itself in many places, including Russia.”

## **#14**

### **Words flare between Georgia and Russia**

**By Matt Robinson and Margarita Antidze**

**Reuters, April 16, 2009**

TBILISI - Georgia and Russia accused each other on Thursday of building up troops and armour at the de facto borders between their forces, and preparing "provocations."

Each side said the other was looking to take advantage of heightened political tensions in Georgia, where the opposition has been protesting in the streets for a week demanding the resignation of President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Russia sent troops into South Ossetia to crush a Georgian assault on the separatist region in August last year, and then officially recognised it and another rebel region of Georgia, Abkhazia, as independent states.

A European Union mission monitoring the cease-fire said it had registered Russian reinforcements at the boundaries between Georgian-controlled territory and South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but had not monitored any significant Georgian build-up.

EU spokesman Stephen Bird said the "significant" Russian reinforcements at the boundary of Abkhazia appeared to have moved back on Thursday.

Asked if they had seen a similar pullback in South Ossetia, Bird said: "Not as far as we have noticed yet."

A confidential assessment compiled by EU diplomats in Georgia and seen by Reuters said the Russian reinforcements included tanks, armoured personnel carriers, artillery and "Grad" multiple-rocket launchers.

## **VOLATILE**

"Thus the situation at the ABL (administrative boundary line) remains in flux and volatile as Russian/South Ossetian forces continue to establish new facts on the ground," said the the assessment, dated April 13.

Georgian Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili said the Russian military had brought in extra forces, "but they never withdrew the old forces."

"We are concerned about this," he said. Utiashvili said Georgia believed an extra 5,000 Russian forces had entered both regions before the protests.

Russia said it had taken "precautionary measures" to ensure security in South Ossetia and Abkhazia during the tense period, adding it had concrete information about likely provocations.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said Russian forces were conducting exercises in order to dissuade Tbilisi from any military action, which he suggested would be used to distract attention from opposition protests.

"We have repeatedly come up against the practice, which has now become customary for official Tbilisi, to search for a way out of internal problems by using external aggression," he said.

"The real danger for the stability of the region is the continued remilitarisation of Georgia including the concentration of special forces and military equipment close to the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

The Georgian Interior Ministry said it had arrested an activist of the Russian pro-Kremlin youth movement "Nashi" who had crossed into Georgian territory from South Ossetia, and accused him of trying to provoke a confrontation.

The ministry said other "Nashi" activist were still in the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, having travelled from Moscow.

## **#15**

### **Moldovan opposition to boycott poll recount Reuters, April 14, 2009**

CHISINAU - Moldova's liberal, pro-Western opposition dismissed as a "trick" a planned recount of the recent disputed election won by the ruling Communist Party and said it would take no part in the process.

The Constitutional Court ordered the recount, scheduled for Wednesday, at the request of Communist President Vladimir Voronin following violent protests against the April 5 vote outcome.

Official results give the Communists nearly 50 percent of the vote and 60 seats -- one short of the number needed to ensure victory for their candidate when parliament chooses the president in the ex-Soviet state between Ukraine and Romania.

Opposition parties demand a new election and say they expect no new results. They say their concern is fraud with voters' lists which they allege contain the names of dead voters and Moldovans working abroad.

"We will not take part in the recount. This is a trick the communists want to use to distract attention from cheating with voters' lists," Serafim Urecheanu of the Our Moldova party, one of three opposition groups to win seats, told a news conference.

"We cannot rule out that they want to find a 61st seat which they need to elect the president."

Vlad Filat of the Liberal Democrats said the opposition would detail alleged cheating to the Constitutional Court.

Voronin accuses rivals of organizing the protests as part of a coup plot fermented by Romania, which shares a cultural and linguistic heritage with Moldova. Romania denies the charge and the opposition has distanced itself from the violence.

Voronin, who has called for further integration with the West while preserving longstanding ties with Russia, has served two consecutive terms and cannot run again. He has said he wants to remain in some kind of decision-making role.

The opposition staged a peaceful 5,000-strong rally on Sunday alleging ill-treatment of detainees held since protesters ransacked the president's office and parliament. Officials say about 200 people have been detained.

In Moscow, where authorities have backed Voronin's handling of the disturbances, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he expected the recount to help stabilize the country.

"We expect all opposition parties to take a responsible approach and to not allow their supporters to rush into violent actions," Lavrov said.

"Of course, special responsibility in this connection lies with the European Union when taking into account the conditions which accompanied the recent disorder."

Voronin has moved closer to the Kremlin recently and applauded its efforts to help resolve an 18-year-old separatist rebellion in Moldova's Russian-speaking Transdnistria region.

## **#16**

### **Is Medvedev Obama's Gorbachev?**

**By Peter Baker**

**ForeignPolicy.com, April 14, 2009**

The art of Kremlinology came back into vogue several years ago and among those who today make a living interpreting the byzantine machinations in Moscow rages a debate: Is Russian President Dmitry Medvedev his own man? And might he even be a closet reformer ready to break the shackles of his system?

To many skeptics, the very idea seems like the triumph of hope over experience. Medvedev owes his career to Vladimir Putin and served loyally at his side through the reconsolidation of state power earlier in the decade. While Medvedev has mouthed supportive words about the rule of law, his tenure has hardly seen much move in that direction so far.

Yet in Washington, London, Paris, and Berlin, many want to believe that Medvedev someday will emerge as a force for change in Russia, a young modernizer who subtly or openly will shift away from his patron and turn his country back onto the road toward civil society. The other night I heard a person close to the Obama administration argue that the smartest policy for the West is to give Medvedev room to maneuver and grow out of his early role as a Putin protégé.

It's interesting how familiar that debate feels when reading James Mann's excellent new book, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*. The essential tension of the book pits Reagan against the conventional wisdom crowd in his assessment of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. While they dismissed the possibility that Gorbachev could represent anything other than a friendlier face for the old "evil empire," Reagan saw something else, a Communist general secretary ready to take on the system that created him to transform his own society.

Just how sharply Reagan tacked against the prevailing winds in Washington comes to life in Mann's account. In relentlessly pursuing accord with Gorbachev on arms control, Reagan the old Cold Warrior defied his conservative base, many in his own State Department and White House, and even Richard Nixon, the architect of détente. Although everyone told him that Gorbachev was faking his commitment to reform in order to strengthen the Soviet Union, Reagan believed his counterpart was the real deal.

As it happens, the skeptics included one Robert M. Gates, then a senior CIA official and now secretary of defense. Gates was so outspoken in his warnings about trusting Gorbachev's reforms that he clashed with some of Reagan's top lieutenants. In one memo on Gorbachev in early 1986 shortly before he became deputy

CIA director, Gates wrote that all signs suggested that "on fundamental objectives and policies he so far remains generally as inflexible as his predecessors."

Gates ultimately was proved wrong. But does that mean that today's skeptics of Medvedev are? Not necessarily. The debate about Gorbachev has repeated itself since then with opposite results. When my wife, Susan Glasser, and I arrived in Moscow at the end of 2000 as correspondents for The Washington Post, many Americans wanted to believe in Putin the way Reagan believed in Gorbachev. After all, he was a young, energetic man installed by Boris Yeltsin and he was the first foreign leader to call then-President George W. Bush to offer his support after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

What we saw up close, though, made clear that was a misjudgment in the other direction. Putin was not the democratic reformer Washington hoped he would be. He was a far more complicated figure intent on reestablishing strong central authority and rebuilding Russia into a great power again. He has not reestablished the Soviet Union, as some overstate the case -- everyday Russian life today is far freer today than it was when Gorbachev took over -- but Putin has labored to squelch any alternative power centers that could challenge him, from parliament and the governors to big business and the news media.

By turning over the presidency to his lieutenant, Medvedev, and becoming prime minister instead, Putin fueled new hope in the West. Many took heart from the fact that Medvedev was not among the KGB veterans known as "siloviki," or men of power, and accepted his promises to take on corruption and "legal nihilism" in Russia and "protect civil and economic freedoms" at face value. What that overlooked was the fact that Putin has said similar things over the years. And Medvedev, the professed champion of freedom and rule of law, previously served Putin as head of Gazprom, the state-controlled energy giant that has been used as an instrument of power against unfriendly media tycoons at home and uncooperative neighbors abroad.

Even as Medvedev flew to London to meet with President Obama for the first time this month, Russian authorities hauled onetime oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky from his jail cell to put him on trial again for what his lawyers call essentially the same charges. Many saw the move as a warning to anyone else who might get out of line like he once did -- and a sign that Moscow could not care less about protests from Khodorkovsky's friends in the West. And at the same time, Medvedev has done nothing evident to rein in Kremlin-backed Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, whose enemies keep getting killed even as far away as Vienna and Dubai.

So Medvedev is no Gorbachev. At least not yet and maybe never. What Mann's book reminds us is how little we understand about what really goes on inside the Russian leadership. Russian leaders, after all, are acting not as we want them to but out of what they see as Russia's interests. Gorbachev believed it was in the Soviet Union's interest to open up a closed system and put an end to the arms race. Reagan recognized that and collaborated with him. After a decade of instability, Putin saw consolidating power both at home and in Russia's immediate neighborhood being in Russia's interest.

So when it comes to evaluating Russian leaders, American presidents have to rely on a mix of gut instinct, sober assessment, and healthy skepticism. And sometimes they will get it right, and sometimes they won't.

*Peter Baker, a White House correspondent for the New York Times, is co-author with Susan Glasser of Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution.*

**#17**

**High Stakes for Moscow in U.S. Play for Iran**

**By Fyodor Lukyanov**

**The Moscow Times, April 15, 2009**

The situation in Iran will likely become the center of global tensions in the months and years ahead. Tehran's desire to establish its status as a regional power will surely clash with Washington's desire to solidify its own global leadership role. And Russia, which has one foot in both camps, will find itself in an increasingly difficult position.

President Barack Obama remains committed to the policy on Iran that he articulated during his election campaign. In short, Washington has a clear interest in normalizing relations with Tehran.

Tehran was the only party to come out an unequivocal winner following the U.S. invasion of Iraq. After Iran's chief nemesis, President Saddam Hussein, was executed, Tehran began to spread its influence throughout a large part of Iraq. If the U.S. forces really do withdraw from Iraq, Iran will play a central role in how events develop further there.

Tehran is an enemy of al-Qaida, and with regard to Pakistan -- a key player in the Afghanistan conflict -- it is envious of its membership in the nuclear club. Iran has no interest in seeing the Taliban victorious in Afghanistan either, and it considers the Taliban -- Sunni radicals who have ties to Saudi Arabia -- to be its main rival in the Islamic world.

What's more, by improving relations with Iran, the United States can achieve its goal of diversifying energy supplies to Europe, which means reducing European dependence on Russian gas and oil. And only Iranian natural gas supplies can make the proposed Nabucco gas pipeline project viable.

The economic and political fallout for Moscow would be enormous if Tehran and Washington even partially normalize relations. Improved relations between the two would give Europe access to Iranian natural gas, meaning that Russia would have to battle with a new, powerful competitor to maintain its share of the European energy market. Furthermore, normal U.S.-Iranian relations would open Iran's domestic market to Western technologies, including in the civilian nuclear power sector, thereby potentially leaving Russia on the sidelines in these lucrative markets.

From a rational point of view, it would be to Washington's advantage to improve relations with Iran the way former U.S. President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger did with China in the 1970s. If Washington can get past its deep aversion to Tehran's theocratic and anti-Semitic regime, we will witness a revolution in global geopolitics. This is all the more a challenge considering that Washington's relations with the current Iranian regime began with a severe conflict 30 years ago when revolutionaries held 52 U.S. diplomats hostage for 444 days. No superpower can easily overlook this brazen act, even 30 years later.

The upcoming presidential election in Iran is unlikely to change the situation drastically. The West hopes that Iran's economic problems will undermine the voter base of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Although the departure of a man who has become a symbol of anti-Semitism and aggression would undoubtedly improve the general atmosphere, it is unlikely to result in fundamental changes in Tehran's policies toward the West.

In any case, there is little chance that the United States will be able to establish a positive dialogue with Iran. Tehran believes that its right to develop a nuclear program is not negotiable, and Washington remains inflexibly opposed to it.

For the sake of argument, let's consider the improbable scenario in which Moscow, in an effort to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons and destabilizing the region, sides with Washington by supporting sanctions against Tehran. Few people seriously believe that international sanctions are capable of preventing Iran from developing its nuclear program. Past experience shows that sanctions are ineffective in such situations.

What would happen next? Would the world have to come to terms with a nuclear-armed Tehran? Washington previously closed a blind eye to India and Pakistan when they "illegally" developed nuclear weapons, and the United States might be able to tolerate one more addition to the nuclear club, in theory, if the country were moderate. But there is a clear difference between letting New Delhi or Islamabad join the club and giving membership rights to the militant anti-U.S. regime in Tehran.

This says nothing of the fact that it would be a serious political defeat for Washington if Iran were to test a nuclear weapon. After all, the administrations of three consecutive U.S. presidents (Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama) have declared that a nuclear-armed Iran is absolutely inadmissible because of the global threat it would represent. What's more, it would have a domino effect, leading other Middle Eastern states to obtain nuclear arms, thereby destroying any attempt to enforce nuclear nonproliferation.

Another option for Obama is to use force to resolve the Iranian question. If the U.S. military is successful in forcing a regime change in Tehran, it will solidify the global status of the United States as the only state capable of resolving the world's problems. In general, U.S. presidents don't sit by and watch impassively during major global events. And if Washington's attempt to establish a rapport with Tehran ends unsuccessfully, it will serve as one more example of how it is pointless to try talking with Iran's leaders.

Iran is a problem for Russia regardless of which direction Tehran goes. A nuclear-armed Iran would greatly destabilize the region. It is difficult to predict the extent and aim of Iran's ambitions. Any attempt by the United States to apply force against Iran would mean that the military conflict would be brought to Russia's southern border. Moreover, if Washington achieves its objectives in Iran, it would shift the strategic balance of power in favor of the United States and away from Moscow. But a failure by the United States to achieve its goals in Iran could undermine the existing balance of power.

No matter how subsequent events develop, Moscow will play no more than a supporting role at best. One big risk for Russia is coming out the loser if it supports the wrong side in the struggle.

*Fyodor Lukyanov is editor of Russia in Global Affairs.*

**#18**

**Medvedev Grants Interview To Anti-Kremlin Newspaper  
Russian President Criticizes Laws Hindering Rights Groups  
By Sarah Schafer  
Washington Post, April 16, 2009**

MOSCOW-- Stepping up efforts to portray himself as a liberal reformer, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev granted an interview to a newspaper that has been fiercely critical of the Kremlin and called Wednesday for changes to laws that have hindered the work of human rights groups and other activist organizations.

Speaking to a recently revived presidential council for promoting civil society and human rights, Medvedev chastised officials for seeing such groups as "a threat to their single-handed rule" and imposing restrictions on them "without any sufficient reason."

"It is not a secret that the idea of human rights activity is seriously distorted in our country," he said, according to the Interfax news agency. "It stems from our history and certain ideological foundations."

The unusually blunt remarks came a day after Medvedev sat down with the opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta, which has seen two of its journalists shot dead in the past three years.

The Novaya Gazeta interview, published Wednesday, was the president's first with a Russian newspaper since taking office nearly a year ago. Though little of what Medvedev said was new, his decision to give the interview to a publication that has aggressively criticized the Kremlin for rolling back democratic reforms appeared intended to further set himself apart from his predecessor and patron, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Medvedev promised the interview in January when he met with the newspaper's editor and one of its owners, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, to express condolences over the killings of reporter Anastasia Baburova and a human rights lawyer who had represented the paper, Stanislav Markelov.

The gesture stood in sharp contrast to Putin's response to the 2006 slaying of another Novaya Gazeta journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent investigative reporter and critic of the Kremlin's conduct of the war in Chechnya. Putin condemned her killing but angered her supporters by adding that her impact on Russian politics had been minimal. He has never granted an interview to an opposition newspaper.

Asked if he intended to "rehabilitate democracy in Russia," Medvedev replied that "democracy as such does not need any kind of rehabilitation." But he added that many Russians associate democracy with the economic difficulties that the country endured in the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union.

He rejected the idea that Russians have given up political freedoms in exchange for wealth, a popular view among Kremlin officials under Putin, some of whom have argued that Western notions of democracy must be adapted for Russian conditions.

"It seems to me that stability and a prosperous life should never be set off against a set of political rights and freedoms," Medvedev said. "Democracy cannot be set off against well-being."

Medvedev's call for changes in the way nongovernmental organizations are regulated was a departure from policy under Putin, who has warned that such groups may be doing the bidding of foreigners trying to undermine Russia. Putin toughened registration rules, which activists say now force them to spend more time submitting documents to state agencies than doing work.

Medvedev noted that the Kremlin "spent quite a lot of time to improve" the legislation but said it remained "far from ideal." He added, "Some changes are possible, and even essential."

In his interview with the paper, Medvedev also praised the Internet as "the best platform" for open debate and brushed off complaints that independent candidates were being harassed in a mayoral race in Sochi, the Black Sea resort scheduled to host the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Asked if he could call judges -- including those presiding over a trial underway against the jailed oil tycoon and Kremlin foe Mikhail Khodorkovsky -- to remind them they are independent, Medvedev declined, saying public officials should not interfere with the courts.

Analysts are divided about how much power Medvedev wields, whether he can back up his words with actions and whether a split is emerging between him and Putin. But Dmitry Babich, a political analyst at Russia Profile magazine, said Medvedev's decision to grant the interview to Novaya Gazeta was a good sign for those hoping for democratic reform.

"He chose a publication which was the most critical of the government and the closest to the liberal dissidents," he said. "The message was to a certain part of the Russian public and to the West that in the future, he wants more democracy for Russia."

## **#19**

### **Opening Remarks at Meeting of the Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights Kremlin.ru, April 15, 2009**

PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA DMITRY MEDVEDEV: Good afternoon, colleagues,

Today is the Council's first meeting in its new membership composition. Everyone on the Council is present here today. I hope that the Council in its new composition will make a useful contribution to the work of civil society and of the authorities. This is a very important but also very complex task.

Today we will discuss our work priorities, the work in which the public and non-governmental organisations [NGOs] are involved. I will not list all of these different areas of work as you are familiar with them. You are all working on these different tasks, each in your own way, and for the most part have been doing so for a good number of years now. Among the subjects we will discuss will be, of course, modernising the judicial system, fighting corruption and extremism, military reform and the associated legal and social issues. Then there is the subject of humanising our society in general, protecting children's rights, and finally, there is the crisis, which is affecting all of us.

I want to say a few words about the NGOs themselves. We will discuss the NGOs' actual operation and status. I realise that you face difficulties in your work and that there are many cases when restrictions are placed on NGOs' activities without sufficient justification. Of course, this stems from the fact that many civil servants see NGOs and their activities as a threat to their monopoly hold on power. This is probably the case not only here in Russia, but in Russia we have the added weight of our own history, which to this day still has quite a visible effect on relations between the authorities and civil society, between the authorities and the NGOs.

Speaking of the laws on NGOs, I imagine that you have questions regarding such laws, and I am ready to listen to your views and your proposals on how to improve respective legislation. Clearly, the said laws are not perfect, even though we have spent a lot of time over these last years on improving them. I think amendments are possible, and in some cases even necessary. I am referring to all the different issues involved: taxation of NGOs, procedures governing relations between the NGOs and the authorities, public awareness of NGOs' activities, state support for civil society organisations, the issue of public expert evaluations, and also public hearings on matters of importance for the society. The laws on NGOs' activities cover all of these different areas, but there is probably still a lot that can be changed.

I want to put particular emphasis on the oft-stated truth that the authorities and human rights activists have huge scope for working together, and we only need to work out how to best combine our efforts. Furthermore, it is no secret that there is a seriously distorted perception of human rights activities in our country. This is due to our history and to some ideological concepts. We need to understand one simple thing: the state itself has a duty to protect human rights, and all those who wish to do so should also be involved in this work. If we pool our efforts and work together, we can perhaps achieve better results.

Another subject I mentioned at the start is the economic crisis. In the crisis situation, we need to reflect on how to build confidence between the authorities and civil society, because we will not get through the crisis without it. There is an objective need for this work today, and it is important to get the NGOs involved in education in every sense of the term, and in healthcare. I hope too that the Council will work actively on the protection of people's social and labour rights, because these rights are in a particularly difficult situation at the moment. The crisis has led to an increase in the number of wrongful dismissals and cases of people being forced to take lengthy periods of leave from their jobs. Unemployment is on the rise, and this in turn increases poverty. These are our common problems, and we need to work on them together.

## **#20**

### **The economy: Market forces or interests of the state?**

**By Stefan Wagstyl**

**Financial Times, April 15, 2009**

For Sergei Naumov, a businessman with interests in pharmacies and property, the nub of the economic crisis is the lack of credit.

"Credit? There isn't any," he says. "Banks are lending at up to 35 per cent for individuals and it takes a week to get the money. For corporates, it's 25 per cent and it takes a month. So your bank has become a python which can strangle you at any time with checks and paperwork."

Mr Naumov explains that in the southern city of Voronezh, where he lives, only five out of 85 banks are now active. The owners of small businesses divide into those who need credit and those who do not.

His pharmacies are fine but his property business has been hit by falling prices and rents. But he is philosophical about the future. He says: "It was more difficult in the 1990s, because we were changing the system as well as going through recession. Now, it's just a recession. We have survived. We can cope."

After at first playing down the impact of the global recession and refusing to use the word "crisis", Russian policymakers now make no bones about the scale of the difficulties facing their country, even if, like their counterparts elsewhere, they tend to be more optimistic than independent observers. Arkady Dvorkovich,

President Dmitry Medvedev's economic adviser, says: "The crisis isn't over ... but the rate of decline is slowing."

The government is forecasting a 2.2 per cent drop in gross domestic product this year, the first contraction in a decade. But with output down 8 per cent in the first two months, the result could be much worse. The World Bank is predicting a 4.5 per cent GDP decline for the year – and an increase in unemployment from 8.5 per cent to 12 per cent.

With the decline in oil, gas and metals prices, Russia's huge current account surplus is set to plunge from \$99bn last year to between \$30bn and \$40bn.

With banks scared to lend, the money supply is contracting and was down 11 per cent in the first two months of 2009. Banks are preparing for mounting non-performing loans. "We can expect the level of overdue loans for the whole system to reach 15-20 per cent," by the end of the year, Pyotr Aven, president of Alfa Bank, the big commercial bank, told the FT recently. As the small business owners of Voronezh can confirm, for those companies that can get credit, interest costs have rocketed.

The government dealt with the first stage of the crisis, principally by supporting the rouble and preventing the severe currency crash that Russians remember bitterly from 1998.

At a cost of \$200bn from the exchange reserves, which have fallen to about \$376bn, the authorities steadied the rouble's 30 per cent drop against its US dollar/euro basket. Independent economists do not foresee any further rapid decline unless oil prices drop from their current levels of about \$40 a barrel.

Yaroslav Lissovolik, chief economist at Deutsche Bank's Moscow office, says: "The rouble now seems stable." The authorities are pinning their faith on an economy-boosting budget that combines support for banks and business with increased welfare spending to offset the impact of rising unemployment.

The package follows an intense policy debate in which the government's economic liberals, headed by Igor Shuvalov, a first deputy prime minister, and Alexei Kudrin, the finance minister, headed off demands from state-first conservatives, led by Igor Sechin, a deputy prime minister, for heavy direct intervention in support of key industries. However, a previously-agreed list of 500 strategic companies will receive special treatment.

The government settled on a planned budget deficit of 7.4 per cent of GDP, though it will be hard to stick to the target if the economy deteriorates more than ministers expect. This would happen if the oil price falls below the official forecast of \$41, which is the basis of the budget, or if demands from crisis-hit industries grow. The car industry alone has been promised more than Rbs 45bn (\$1bn). After 7.4 per cent this year, the government envisages deficits of 5 per cent next year and 3 per cent in 2011.

Even in non-crisis conditions, managing spending would be difficult, not least with inflation running at 13 per cent. The authorities have seen sporadic social protests, notably in Vladivostok, and are anxious to stop them spreading.

However, Russia is fortunate that this public spending surge can be financed from reserves. Mr Shuvalov says the country can finance deficits from reserves for another two years after 2009. "We understand that if there are no more major shifts in the world economy and if the recession is as deep as it is now, then we have money in our reserves for three years to cover the deficit."

After that, Russia would have to borrow, as the US is already doing. But Russian officials indicate that Moscow would not wait until the last moment, but tap the markets earlier, if necessary.

For the long term, the main question is how the crisis changes the economy. For the moment, the government is increasing its role by supporting banks and businesses, but the authorities insist they want to keep their distance and allow business bosses to settle the growing disputes over debt repayments and restructurings.

Igor Yurgens, head of the Institute of Contemporary Development, a Moscow think-tank close to the president, says the crisis “will bring big changes in ownership” with debt-laden entrepreneurs losing out.

However, it is unclear how far market forces will be allowed to run when the interests of state- and oligarch-controlled companies come under pressure.

## #21

### **The middle class: New consumers present a conundrum**

**By Charles Clover**

**Financial Times, April 15, 2009**

When she was still a child, just over 10 years ago, Anna Leonova, a student at Moscow State University, remembers vividly her family's dire financial situation.

“There was one day I remember very well. We had three roubles left. Payday was the next day, but we didn't know if my father would actually receive his salary.”

Today, things have improved and she and her parents have a different type of crisis. She wants her own car, and her father does not think she needs it. “He says he can't afford it, but I know he can,” she says laughing.

Ms Leonova and her parents represent Russia's newly emerging middle class which has grown rapidly as the size of the economy more than doubled since 2000 and average wages rose by 142 per cent in real, inflation-adjusted terms.

A decade ago, only Russians who earned foreign currency salaries, or had their own businesses, could afford the luxuries of life.

But today, people like Ms Leonova's parents – her mother works in local government in their suburb of Moscow, her father in a private company – can afford vacations, evenings at the theatre and second cars.

The definition of Russia's middle class is admittedly a bit looser than in western countries; researchers commonly designate as “middle income” or “middle class” anyone who tells an opinion pollster that they “can afford to buy major appliances”, typically between 10 and 25 per cent of the samples.

Everyone, from supermarket chains to mobile phone sellers to the Kremlin, wants to know more about the fastest growing group of consumers, and most interesting group of voters, in Russia. Marketing specialists want to know what they buy. The Kremlin wants to know what they believe in.

The future of Russia, many say, hangs on their shoulders. But while they are one of the most exhaustively studied social groups in Russia, there is still disagreement about who they are and how to define them. Most importantly, researchers are sharply divided on whether such a class can even be said to exist.

Alexei Levinson of the Levada Centre, a sociological research group, says that while there is such a thing as “middle income Russians” the term “class” – in the sense of a group of people united by certain basic values that distinguish them from other social groups – is controversial.

“It's hard to call them a class, as it's hard to say if they all have the same interests,” he says, explaining that some are property owners, some are highly paid bureaucrats and some are specialist corporate employees. This diversity makes it difficult to pin their colours to the same socio-economic mast.

Nevertheless, with the same fervour that orthodox Marxist-Leninists once placed their hopes in the proletariat, a new generation of political scientists believes the emerging middle class to be the engine of history.

The Kremlin, for example, thinks they will be a base of support. Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin's chief spin doctor, described them as "the electorate of [Prime Minister Vladimir] Putin and [President Dmitry] Medvedev" in a speech last November entitled "in search of a middle class".

Meanwhile, liberal opponents of authoritarian rule also place great stock in them. Rather than a bulwark of authoritarianism, they believe the middle class will be a force for democratic change and will demand a free press, civil society and rule of law.

Mr Levinson says that, despite the optimism of the liberals, there is no systematic relationship discernible in the data between political views and income levels. "This idea that people become more liberal the richer they become is fantasy," he says.

In a recent Levada study, for example, 44 per cent of those defined as middle class said they "definitely" or "probably" supported the decision by Russian authorities to withdraw the conviction of Yuri Budanov, a Russian army colonel convicted of war crimes in Chechnya, whose early release from prison was a cause celebre among the far right.

Studies show that wealthy Russians are just as likely if not more so to support conservative, patriotic nationalism, distrust foreign governments and support the Kremlin. "This is a class of people that 10 years ago was starving to death, and now they are doing OK and they think they owe it all to Putin," says Mikhail Delyagin, a Moscow economist.

But Russia's economic crisis looms for those who have only just arrived at coveted middle class status. Many may lose their foothold on the social ladder as a result of unemployment or inflation.

The World Bank predicts 12 per cent unemployment in Russia for 2009, up from 8.5 per cent in February and Mr Levinson has noticed growing pessimism in recent polls.

Since October, the number of people he canvassed who said they "could afford to buy major appliances" – the common denominator of the middle income in Russia – fell by 7 per cent. His sample showed the proportion to be 15 per cent in February.

"It doesn't mean they are actually poorer, but it does mean they feel poorer," says Mr Levinson.

## **#22**

### **Russia still wary of US missile shield: Lavrov AFP, April 16, 2009**

MOSCOW, April 16 2009-US proposals to ease Moscow's concerns over its plans to site a missile shield in Europe are merely "symbolic," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in comments published Thursday.

"Overall, the measures of 'transparency and trust' offered to us were mostly symbolic and could not contribute to mitigating Russian concerns," Lavrov said, answering reader's questions in the government newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

It was unlikely that the United States would agree to a jointly controlled missile defence system, a proposal put forth by Moscow as an alternative to the US shield, he added.

"The US, as everyone knows, has never given control to anyone, will not now and obviously will never give up control over their strategic systems," he said. Moscow had proposed a "dual key" control system giving Russia the power to block launches.

Russo-US relations were badly strained under the administration of former US president George W. Bush, which pushed ahead with plans to deploy parts of a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic despite Moscow's objections.

While Washington views the shield as protection from "rogue" states such as Iran, Moscow says the system poses a threat to its nuclear deterrent.

But both countries have offered up diplomatic overtures and hopes for better relations under US President Barack Obama.

Lavrov dubbed the moment a "historic chance" but added that Russia was still waiting for the United States to prove its willingness to reset relations.

But he added: "The reset technology works only if the people employing it want it to."

Previous such attempts had been thwarted by NATO's eastward expansion in the 1990s and by US support for Georgia during its war last year with Russia, he said.

"The problem is that in the last 20 years we twice unilaterally carried out such a reset with the aim of breaking down Cold War barriers, and twice we were met with the unwillingness of our partners to meet us halfway," Lavrov said.

Obama said this month that he would move ahead with US plans for the missile shield, saying Iran remained a "real threat" but adding that the system needed to be "cost-effective and proven."

## **#23**

### **Ukraine's Orange Revolution fades into disillusion**

**By Natalia A. Feduschak**

**Washington Times April 16, 2009**

BUCHACH, Ukraine | Volodymyr Mushak voted for Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine's highly contested presidential race in 2004. He is not sure he would do so again.

"I don't see the result of his work," said Mr. Mushak, who teaches business and economics at a local institute in this historic town in western Ukraine. "As for parliament, they made Ukraine into mud."

Sentiments like these can be heard all over the country. Four years after the Orange Revolution propelled Mr. Yushchenko and a team of Western-oriented reformers to power, Ukraine is in a quagmire and Mr. Yushchenko - once the darling of the George W. Bush administration - has approval ratings of 3.5 percent.

Gross domestic product shriveled by 25 percent to 30 percent in the first two months of 2009, Mr. Yushchenko has acknowledged. In the industrial east, factory closings have strangled output and led to massive job cuts. In the agricultural west, anxious farmers are unsure how they can revive declining fortunes.

Numerous polls show Ukrainians increasingly distrust their leaders and are tired of the infighting that has dominated the country's politics. Most of all, they are unhappy with their president.

"Admit your mistakes of the last 4 1/2 years," said Viktor Yanukovich, Mr. Yushchenko's opponent in 2004 and now leader of the opposition. "We need to tell the truth about what happened to our country, what state the country is in," he recently told a late-night television audience.

Mr. Yushchenko's supporters say democracy has been consolidated during his tenure.

Raisa Bohatyrova, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, told editors and reporters of The Washington Times on Wednesday that Mr. Yushchenko made "enormous efforts to revive the Ukrainian identity, is a champion of free press and free speech" and had "encouraged the growth of civil society."

Public expectations in 2004 were too high, she said, and people expected "immediate positive results. ... It's very hard and can't take place overnight."

She faulted a constitution that does not adequately separate powers between the president and parliament as well as global economic events beyond Ukraine's control.

Opponents say Mr. Yushchenko has not shown strong leadership. They blame him for frequent public denunciation of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, his one-time Orange Revolution ally, as the two have struggled for power.

They also say he has not been aggressive enough in stopping the steep economic decline.

In a recent address to parliament, Mr. Yushchenko said Ukraine had lost its foreign markets, particularly for steel and chemicals, and 60 percent of its exports in the wake of the global economic crisis.

"We were ill-prepared to confront the crisis, and its first blow was painful and difficult. ... The consequence of this was a slowdown in [gross domestic product] growth in 2008 to 2.1 percent ... and a destructive fall of 25 [percent] to 30 percent according to figures from January to February 2009," he said.

Ukraine is in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to receive a second tranche of a \$16.5 billion loan to stabilize its economy.

Ukraine's next presidential elections initially were scheduled for Jan. 17, but parliament recently voted to move the date to Oct. 25.

Mr. Yushchenko has said he would support a presidential vote in October if parliamentary elections were held simultaneously.

"I will be taking part in both elections," he told the Kommersant Ukraina daily on Wednesday. "When I look at the ratings, it does not mean that I have to reach for some heart medication. ... I know that behind me are millions of people who share my values."

The president's approval rating is 3.5 percent, according to a March survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, a Kiev-based think tank. Mr. Yanukovich led the pack of expected contenders with about 17 percent of the vote, while Mrs. Tymoshenko came in a close second with almost 16 percent.

Arseniy Yatseniuk, 34, a former speaker of parliament who many here say could surge in popularity, now places third with 12 percent. Volodymyr Lytvyn, the current parliament speaker, had 5.9 percent.

Mrs. Bohatyrova said there could be "totally different faces by the time of the election," but she did not give details.

Some analysts caution against holding simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections.

"It opens up the possibility for falsification and wrongdoing," said Tanya Boyko of Opora, a nonprofit group that monitors elections. "It will be impossible to ensure open and transparent elections."

Despite his unhappiness with Mr. Yushchenko, Mr. Mushak, the teacher, said he is skeptical about an October vote.

"For the upper echelons of power, the early elections are a good idea because they are fighting for the presidential chair. But today we don't see young progressive leaders. The establishment will never let them into power," said Mr. Mushak, who headed Buchach's election commission in 2004.

Mr. Mushak said he is concerned that Ukrainian politicians are merely playing musical chairs, with each one taking their turn at the helm but not instituting significant reforms. "We don't want to play their political games, because they don't do anything."

Victoria Vasylenko, 30, a Kiev-based lawyer, agreed.

"It can't continue this way," he said. "Ukraine needs leaders who will think about the people, and with these leaders, we will go to Europe. With each day, we lose more and more."

**#24**  
**Sharansky, Wiesel to help counter 'Durban II' conference**  
**Human rights groups enlist help of prominent members of Jewish community and survivors of torture**  
**By Yitzhak Benhorin**  
**YNetNews, 04.13.09**

WASHINGTON - Prominent members of the Jewish community and survivors of racially-motivated torture from Africa, Cuba and Burma have joined an unprecedented campaign, led by a coalition of 40 human rights groups from around the world, to present human rights and discrimination issues that the world community should address when they gather next week.

Known as 'Durban II,' the conference is to be held in Geneva next week.

The events will be held alongside demonstrations various Jewish groups are expected to hold in protest of the conference's agenda, which is expected to be anti-Israeli in nature.

One of the organizations behind the summit is UN Watch.

Established 15 years ago, UN Watch's mission is to monitor the performance of the United Nations "by the yardstick of its own charter". UN Watch is heading a coalition of numerous non-governmental organizations that will attempt to prevent Iran, Cuba and other countries from hijacking the conference's agenda.

Prominent members of the Jewish community, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Eli Wiesel, French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy and former prisoner of Zion and Israeli minister and Natan Sharansky are expected to attend a number of events that will be held on the sidelines of the 'Durban II' conference, which will kick off on Sunday.

As part of the effort to raise public awareness to the issues of discrimination and racially-motivated torture, an event dubbed the "Geneva Summit for Human Rights, Tolerance and Democracy" will be held a day before the "Durban II" conference convenes.

Invited speakers include survivors of the genocide in Rwanda and former dissidents from Iran, Cuba and Myanmar.

In addition, a Holocaust memorial service, organized by the Jewish Community of Geneva is set to be held on Monday at Geneva's Palace of Nations.