

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 2, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Richard Stone, NCSJ Chairman;
Alexander Smukler, NCSJ President;
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

In Brief: Looking Back, Looking Forward

Dear Friend,

This is a time of great challenge for the development of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union. The economic crisis has restricted the ability of individuals and groups, both inside and outside of the region, to maintain support for needed services. As in the United States, Jewish leaders and communities in the FSU are making difficult choices. There is much to rejoice about in the FSU, and there is still much to accomplish – educationally, communally, religiously and politically.

NCSJ focuses on ensuring that the FSU remains open and hospitable to organizations that support the growth of Jewish life. We partner with international and indigenous groups that meet the needs of the elderly, infirm and hungry, with groups that fulfill the spiritual needs of FSU Jewry, and groups that expand educational, cultural and social opportunities.

Without the systematic political changes that occurred in the wake of the Soviet Union's implosion, the Jewish population might look very different today. The Soviet Union's collapse created endless possibilities for the Jewish community. NCSJ was one of the first organizations to recognize that a sizable number of Jews would not leave the region and to see the potential for bringing Judaism to so many who were without it for over 70 years. We facilitated a difficult discussion with our friends in Israel and constituents in the United States about what could be done, and since 1991, NCSJ's advocacy with the 15 governments of the FSU, the U.S. government and various international organizations has paid and continues to pay dividends for the Jewish community.

I began by writing about difficult choices. We cannot afford to allow the gains made over the last 20 years in the former Soviet Union to disappear. I continue to believe that, while our community is becoming more diverse and fractured, we can continue to unite around certain issues, and must continue to seize opportunities to assist those in the FSU in building Jewish identities. With your support, NCSJ will continue to fulfill our vital advocacy mission.

Yesterday, a Haaretz op-ed called for a Jewish boycott of Ukraine. The writer misses what is happening in Ukraine. Ukraine's Jewish community is not targeted by its government; on the contrary, the government has been quite supportive in a number of areas. Of course the government does not have a perfect record in dealing with anti-Semitism, and we would like Ukraine's leaders to be more proactive than reactive on issues like the Uzhgorod mayor's recent ugly, anti-Semitic comments. However, the government did isolate and stop Ukraine's largest private university's virulently anti-Semitic operation, something the author missed. Also, while even the plans to desecrate the Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial by building a hotel on or near it were deeply troubling, the government in the end prevented local authorities from moving forward with those plans. In these situations, working *with* the Ukrainian government has achieved positive results.

This week in Poland, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is meeting to discuss a full range of human rights concerns. The meeting is an opportunity to push for greater member state compliance with OSCE principles, as well to seek support for special conferences on anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance.

The OSCE has been in the forefront of the struggle to combat the rise of global anti-Semitism, and NCSJ and a number of our member agencies are supporting an initiative to hold an OSCE conference on anti-Semitism in 2010. This week's update contains a few stories about the conference.

Last month, legendary folk singer and activist Mary Travers, of Peter, Paul & Mary, passed away. She and her partners were strong supporters of the Soviet Jewry movement, and performed at the 1987 March on Washington. She will be missed.

On behalf on the entire NCSJ leadership and staff, Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark B. Levin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail.

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. October 2, 2009

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#1a

Ukraine: Call to Russia for Extraditions

AP, September 29, 2009

President Viktor A. Yushchenko has urged Russia to turn over three men for questioning over his poisoning five years ago. Mr. Yushchenko said in an interview broadcast Sunday night that the men were at the dinner in 2004 during which he believes that he was poisoned with dioxin. Their testimony, he said, was crucial to finishing the investigation. Mr. Yushchenko fell gravely ill while campaigning against a Russia-backed rival in 2004. The poisoning badly scarred his face. He has accused Moscow of stalling the investigation by refusing extraditions in the case or to provide Russian-made dioxin for testing.

#1b

New Babi Yar monument unveiled

JTA, September 30, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- A monument to the victims of Babi Yar based on a book about German-occupied Kiev during World War II was unveiled.

The bronze statue representing a teenage boy, which reflects the main character of the Anatoly Kuznetsov novel "Babi Yar," was unveiled Tuesday in the Kurenivka district of the Ukrainian capital, not far from the Babi Yar reserve. The book describes Kuznetsov's experiences in Nazi-occupied Kiev during the war.

The novel included previously unknown details about the execution of 33,771 Jews over the course of two days, Sept. 29-30, 1941, in the Kiev ravine Babi Yar. Kuznetsov said he grew up "a stone's throw" from the ravine.

The memorial was erected on the initiative of Kuznetsov's son, Alexey, by Vladimir Zhuravel, a Kiev architect, and funded by an anonymous Ukrainian businessman with support of the Inshe Zhyttya International Charitable Fund.

Holocaust survivors, witnesses to the tragedy, local Jews and other area residents attended the unveiling. The ceremony featured a dramatic theatrical performance.

"Babi Yar," published in Russian in 1966, gained greater fame for Kuznetsov but led to his persecution by the Soviet regime. He died in London in 1979.

#1c

Holocaust monument erected in Dnepropetrovsk

JTA, September 30, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- A monument to Holocaust victims was erected in the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk.

The memorial complex was dedicated Tuesday on the site of the "New Jewish cemetery," where a mass grave was found recently. During the Holocaust, the Nazis killed Dnepropetrovsk Jews at the site of the memorial.

Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, was an honored guest of the ceremony. Also attending were the mayor of Dnepropetrovsk, local officials, rabbis, Jewish community representatives, residents of

Dnepropetrovsk, students of the Ohr Avner Chabad Lubavitch Dnepropetrovsk Jewish School and World War II veterans.

Gennady Bogolyubov, chair of the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community, spearheaded the monument with the financial support of Privat Bank.

The Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community opened the New Jewish cemetery in 1903. Victims of pogroms, Soviet repression and the Holocaust are buried there.

#1d

Book documents Holocaust in FSU

JTA, October 1, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- A new encyclopedia documents the history of the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union.

The book is a project of the Russian Holocaust Center and Rosspen publishing house.

Ilya Altman, leader of the project and co-chair of the Russian Holocaust Center of Moscow; Alla Gerber, president of the Moscow Holocaust Foundation; and Anatoly Podolsky, director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, presented the encyclopedia Thursday at a seminar on the Holocaust.

Leaders of the project, scientists, former prisoners of ghettos and concentration camps, and educators participated in the seminar at the Institution of Political, Ethnic and National Studies of the Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences in Kiev.

The "Encyclopedia of Holocaust on the territory of the USSR" features newly discovered and mostly unpublished photos, facts and recollections. The book also contains documents that shed new light on Jewish life during the occupation and Holocaust.

The encyclopedia includes articles by nearly 100 authors from 12 countries, including biographical articles and those devoted to the key issues of the Holocaust.

The authors used materials from more than 70 archives and museums in the Russian Federation and former Soviet countries, as well as Israel, Germany, Poland, the United States and France.

Some of the articles were written by former concentration camp and ghetto prisoners, as well as survivors. One thousand copies of the book, in Russian, were printed.

#1e

Russia: Scientology Ban Is Ruled Illegal

AP, October 2, 2009

Russia's ban on the Church of Scientology is illegal, the European Court of Human Rights said Thursday in a binding ruling. The ruling, which cannot be appealed, ended a case brought by two Russian Scientology branches that were refused listing as "religious organizations" because they had not existed for at least 15 years. The court, based in Strasbourg, France, said Russia could not ban the Church of Scientology only because it had not been in the country for long, and awarded the groups a total of nearly \$30,000 in damages and costs.

#2

FSU Summer Camps Exceed All Expectations Despite Budget Cuts

World Union for Progressive Judaism, October 1, 2009

Close to 1,000 youngsters and young adults in the former Soviet Union took part of 13 summer camps held in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Latvia despite initial fears that major financial cutbacks might even cancel the

program for 2009. The camps were supervised by the leadership and staff of the local branches of Netzer Olami, the World Union's international Zionist youth movement.

"These camps enabled children, youth, students and families to strengthen their Jewish identity and return to their traditional and religious roots," says Alex Kagan, who oversees FSU programs and operations for the World Union. "Nothing is more important, as these people represent the hopes and future of Progressive Judaism in the FSU."

According to Rita Fruman, FSU coordinator for Netzer Olami, the World Union's international Progressive Zionist youth movement, the summer camps provide "some of the only time in which our youth in FSU can immerse themselves for one week in Jewish life. When I visit these camps, I see the enthusiasm of the participants, the hunger in their eyes and the desire to learn more."

The camps, consisting of both sleep-away and day camp programs, were led by the World Union's six resident FSU rabbis, as well as by Netzer professionals and Progressive rabbis and educators from Israel and elsewhere. They catered to various age groups, ranging from pre-teens through teens and up to university students and young adults.

One of the camps for teens included a special guest: Rachel Gershon of Chicago, who is active in the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) and traveled to Kiev just to participate in the camp. Another, in Minsk, focused on Netzer Olami's 30th birthday, while the final camp, held for counselors at the conclusion of the camp season, was a "camp on wheels" that traveled from Poland to the Crimean Peninsula and on to Uman (burial place of the legendary Chasidic figure Rabbi Nachman of Breslav) and Kiev, taking in all the sites relevant to Jews and Jewish history.

Three of the camps were for young families. One, held in Lipetsk, Russia, was for Jewish, Armenian and Azerbaijani families and, according to Progressive congregation chairwoman Olga Zamatina, "was aimed at finding common ground and building friendships and long-lasting relationships." The other, held in Moscow, was for families having children with special needs.

"One of the principal ideologies of the World Union is tikkun olam [repairing the world]," says Kagan, "and the example that comes to mind when I speak of practical implementation is this camp. It makes our community and children better and more patient people, more caring and sensitive, and I am very proud that our movement is actively pursuing this path."

#3

Op-Ed: FSU renaissance still needs support

By Sandy Cardin

JTA, September 27, 2009

TULSA, Okla. -- For millennia, the month of Elul has been a time for contemplation for many Jews. The waning of the prior year and the promise of a new beginning offer the perfect opportunity to take stock of where we have traveled and the road that lies ahead.

It was against this background of our tradition that I recently traveled to Kiev and, on my way home, found myself reflecting on the miraculous revival of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union, a transformation I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand during the past two decades.

Fifteen years ago, the Jews of the former Soviet Union were just awakening from 70 years of oppression. The Communist regime prohibited the practice of Judaism, and those synagogues that were neither destroyed nor allowed to fall into ruin were put to use by the state for non-religious purposes.

Other than the JDC and Chabad, very few Jewish groups had any meaningful representation and programs in the region, and the mix of apprehension and ignorance among the local Jewish population made working there a very difficult task.

Despite these obstacles, Charles (z"l) and Lynn Schusterman considered the lifting of the Iron Curtain a window of opportunity that they simply could not afford to miss. They also felt there could be significant lessons to be learned about assimilation and the power of the Jewish experience from a people returning to Judaism from a deep, dark, government-imposed slumber.

And so, in 1994, our foundation joined with Hillel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to open Hillel programs in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev. Our goals were to begin to plant the seeds of a vibrant Jewish community in the former Soviet Union and then, if we were successful, to discover what it is about Judaism that kept a yearning alive for so many. We hoped that answer would ultimately hold the key to Jewish renewal in the United States and elsewhere.

Today, what we and others sowed in the '80s and '90s have grown into fruit-bearing trees from which the local and global Jewish community will benefit for years to come. In addition to the 26 Hillels in the region, there are synagogues, Jewish community centers, chesedim (social service/welfare centers), kindergartens, day schools, camps, youth programs, academic groups, women groups and Taglit/Birthright Israel. Even local Jewish funders, including the Genesis Philanthropic Group, are supporting a variety of other projects in the region, including Hillel.

In short, it is no longer a stretch to talk in terms of Jewish communal life in places such as Kiev and Kharkov, Tashkent and Tblisi, Moscow and Minsk. Thanks to the efforts of many, a strong Jewish infrastructure now exists to support the Jews of these communities, especially those who still live on meager pensions and require our ongoing assistance.

Of course, our community-building work in the FSU is far from over. Even in these difficult economic times, we must continue to make long-term investments in the region in addition to meeting individual needs of the elderly and infirm or risk watching our hard-earned gains of the past 20 years slip away. We cannot afford to take an 'either-or' approach; an "and-both" is our only alternative, and we must find ways to muster the resolve and the resources to make that happen.

And what of the lessons we hoped to learn?

We confirmed our sense that using Hillel to reach out, educate and empower young Jews would be an effective way to identify, recruit, train and engage a new generation of Jewish communal leadership, both lay and professional. Throughout the FSU, as well as in organizations in the United States and Israel that serve Russian-speaking populations, there are Jews like Dasha Privalko, who was a teenager when I met her on my first trip to Kiev and today, as an adult, is a senior member of the Hillel Ukraine team.

We were introduced to the power of service. Years before it was as fashionable as it is today, dozens of young Jews from inside and outside the FSU traveled throughout the region each spring to help lead Passover sederim. Jews who thought no one knew or cared about them shared an educational and emotional Jewish experience with young people who, in turn, received at least as much in return as those to whom they brought great joy.

We also were exposed to the value of providing young Jews from one region with opportunities to work alongside their peers from other communities and countries. This is a lesson that Taglit now employs so effectively to help strengthen Jewish identity.

Finally, the vitally important concept of "meeting people where they are" emerged from the earliest days of the FSU Hillel program and now has become the generally accepted approach to outreach in America. It took almost no time at all for us to realize that for Judaism to flourish anew in the FSU, especially among those young Jews for whom the post-Soviet lifestyle is all they have ever experienced, Jewish life in the region must be one of their own making.

It is at a time like this, one of reflection and rebirth, that we can draw inspiration from the revival of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union. It is a story that embodies the enduring values of our heritage, the remarkable resilience of our people and the unlimited potential of our future.

Sandy Cardin is president of the Schusterman Family Foundation.

#4

Kiev mayor halts hotel plan at Babi Yar massacre site: reports AFP, September 27, 2009

KIEV — The mayor of Ukraine's capital Kiev has blocked a plan that could have seen a hotel built at the site of the memorial to the largest Nazi massacre of Jews in the Soviet Union, reports said on Saturday.

A plan adopted by Kiev's municipal council to build a range of new hotels in preparation for the European football championships in 2012 included a scheme for a complex at the site of the Babi Yar memorial in the Kiev suburbs.

The plan prompted outrage from Jewish groups, who accused Ukraine of insulting the memory of those killed under Nazi occupation in World War II.

But Kiev Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky has used his veto to block the plan for hotels and "in particular the hotel complex at 52-54 Melnikova Street", the municipal newspaper Khreshchatik quoted his press service as saying.

That address lies right next to the Babi Yar memorial. The Interfax Ukraine news agency said members of the municipal council had voted for the hotel completely unaware of its location.

Israel's President Shimon Peres, in a statement, hailed the mayor "for having taken this just and important decision which preserves the memory of the Shoah as an education for future generations."

The Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem for the Holocaust, also swiftly welcomed the reports from Kiev.

"I welcome the decision of the mayor of Kiev who must have taken into account the protests of Jewish associations including Yad Vashem," its committee president, Avner Shalev, told AFP.

"Babi Yar is a memorial site not only for Jews but for the whole of Europe ... It would have been inconceivable to turn it into a commercial centre."

Chernovetsky described the reports that Kiev had already approved the construction of a hotel on the site as a "crude provocation". He said the vote by municipal authorities in no way meant land had been granted for the hotel.

The memorial complex at Babi Yar (Woman's Ravine) marks the place where on September 29-30, 1941, nearly 34,000 Jews were shot by occupying German forces and their local collaborators in the largest shooting massacre of the Holocaust.

Up to 60,000 more people were killed at Babi Yar up to 1943, among them Jews, Roma, resistance fighters and Soviet prisoners of war.

The solemn ceremonies in commemoration of the Babi Yar victims are conducted in Ukraine every year, and some anti-fascist and Jewish organisations are planning to organise a meeting-requiem on the occasion of the 68th anniversary of the Nazi massacre on Sunday.

The massacre was the subject of the revered 13th Symphony of Soviet composer Dmitry Shostakovich who set to music the poem "Babi Yar" by Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

The massacre was played down by the post-war Soviet Union and the authorities only allowed a memorial to the murdered Jews to be built in 1991.

Ukraine is under enormous pressure to improve its facilities ahead of its joint hosting of Euro 2012 with Poland after being repeatedly criticised by UEFA for its slack preparations.

#5

Chernovetsky: No hotel in Babyn Yar

By staff and from wire reports

Kyiv Post, September 26, 2009

Ukrainian news media are reporting that Kyiv Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky has vetoed a plan by the city council to build a hotel near the Babyn Yar gravesite, where more than 100,000 victims of World War II atrocities are buried.

The president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, Vadym Rabinovych, said he spoke to Chernovetsky about the issue.

Rabinovych told MIG News: "Today I really had a talk with Chernovetsky about Babi Yar because it is a question of principle for the Jewish community and not only Ukraine. He claimed firmly and definitely that all these publications and rumors [of a hotel being built on Babi Yar] are a deliberate provocation and black PR. Leonid assured me that the issue of constructing any hotel in this historical and sacred place has been axed a long ago.

Rabinovych quoted the mayor as saying: "There is just a provocation. Kyiv city administration has never made any decision on hotel construction in the historic places of Kyiv including Baby Yar. There will be no hotel in Baby Yar!"

Citing a report in Kreshchatyk newspaper, Korrespondent.net is also reporting that Chernovetsky vetoed a city council decision to build a hotel in Kyiv near Babi Yar, where more than 30,000 Jews were massacred in a two-day period in September 1941.

Khreschatyk, the Kyiv municipal newspaper, said Chernovetsky made the decision after plans to build a hotel near the Babi Yar memorial was criticized internationally. Altogether, the Babi Yar ravine is believed to be the gravesite for more than 100,000 World War II victims killed by Nazi Germany.

Chernovetsky said that the decision of city council did not provide for allocation of land and no building permits have been approved. It was approved in connection with preparations for Euro 2012, the soccer tournament to be co-hosted by Ukraine and Poland.

Chernovetsky called the media reports "a serious provocation."

He said the city council and city administration, which he chairs, never allocates land for building on national shrines, "which, of course, applies to Babi Yar memorial," Chernovetsky said.

However, other city council members said that Babi Yar was among a number of parks where development was considered.

The controversy erupted on Sept. 24, days before the 68th anniversary of the killing of more than 30,000 Jews in late September 1941 at Babi Yar, a ravine that became choked with the bodies of victims shot at its edges.

Legislators loyal to Chernovetsky approved a plan last week to build dozens of hotels in the city over the next decade, including one across the street from a monument commemorating the victims.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel decried the plan, saying it disrespected the dead and demonstrated Ukrainian authorities' reluctance to investigate wartime collaboration with the Nazis.

"The plan to build a hotel on the site of the one of the worst Holocaust massacres is an example of utter insensitivity to the terrible crimes committed by the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators during World War II," the Center said in a statement. "We urge the Ukrainian authorities to take all necessary measures to prevent the building of such an obviously inappropriate edifice at Babi Yar."

More than 33,700 Jews were rounded up and shot at Babi Yar over 48 hours beginning on Sept. 29, 1941. In the ensuing months, the ravine was filled with an estimated 100,000 bodies, among them those of non-Jewish Kiev residents and Red Army prisoners of the Nazis.

The hotel was to have been built in the middle of the main killing site, according to Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, a leading Ukrainian Babi Yar scholar.

"You wouldn't build a hotel in Babi Yar because you would be afraid that nobody would go there," Nakhmanovich said. "But they build for people like themselves."

Oleksandr Bryhynets, who heads the Kiev city council's culture and tourism commission, said the planned three-star, 700-room hotel would be named Babi Yar. He called the plan immoral and said he would fight it.

"Such sacred places, which have already become the face of the city ... are no place for hotels," said Bryhynets, a member of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's faction in the city council. "The authorities have no morals."

Lawmaker Viktor Hrinuk, from Chernovetsky's faction, said the hotel would not disturb any remains. He also said the plan was not final and subject to change.

"We need to start somewhere," Hrinuk said, according to his party's press service. "When the land is distributed, then we can start discussions."

Jewish leaders have expressed concern over what they say are persistent instances of disrespect for Jewish heritage and of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, which lost 1.4 million of its 2.4 million Jews during the Holocaust.

The mayor of the western city of Uzhhorod is under investigation for making what was widely seen as an anti-Semitic remark referring to a leading politician and presidential hopeful.

Ukraine is also torn by controversy over the extent of wartime collaboration with the Nazis.

Jewish leaders also condemned Tuesday's decision by lawmakers in the western city of Lviv to call on President Viktor Yushchenko to secure the release of a Ukrainian-born man accused by German authorities of involvement in the murder of 27,900 people at a Nazi death camp. The legislators say they believe 89-year-old John Demjanjuk, who lived for decades in the United States following the war, is innocent and that materials incriminating him were fabricated by Soviet authorities.

#6

Who's for seconds?

By Charles Clover and Stefan Wagstyl

Financial Times, September 21, 2009

In Moscow they call it "the 2012 problem". Asked for the first time point blank about their plans for Russia's presidential elections in less than three years' time, Vladimir Putin, prime minister, and Dmitry Medvedev, president, gave similar answers.

Mr Putin, president until 2008, when he anointed his protege Mr Medvedev his successor, signalled his intention to return, telling a group of visiting Russia experts: "We will decide it amongst ourselves." Mr Medvedev told the same group: "A while ago, I had no intention of running for the presidency but fate has intervened...and I am not ruling anything out."

On the surface, innocuous words. But Russia's political class nonetheless senses that the scripted and harmonious relationship between the two has suddenly been injected with political competition. The notion that there might be a real contest for the Kremlin was captured in a front page headline of Monday's Vedomosti newspaper: "Election 2012: The president's and prime minister's teams launch their primaries."

The election, due by spring 2012, is some time off. While Mr Putin is the clear favourite, much could happen be-tween now and then to make the best-laid plans of both men irrelevant. But in Russia's "managed democracy", where the interests of bureaucrats, businesspeople and, not least, the security services must be taken into account,

the question is not really of an election but of a succession, the outcome of which is likely to be determined well in advance of polling day.

That makes this period a critical one. The succession question has the potential to roil Kremlin politics, creating risks, distractions and uncertainties – as could anything that creates tension between the men who have governed the country in mostly harmonious tandem since May 2008. “This is the most sensitive issue in Russia,” says Dimitri Simes of the Nixon Center in Washington.

Even if events do not take a radical turn, a power struggle between Mr Putin and Mr Medvedev could prompt destructive bureaucratic battles between officials, and between business oligarchs who might be dragged into the fight. Political and economic decision-making could be delayed – with serious effects given the challenges Russia faces, including managing a crisis-hit economy, energy exports, ties with the west, violence in the Caucasus and difficult relations with neighbours, notably Georgia and Ukraine.

One example is the recent U-turn on World Trade Organisation policy, when Russia unexpectedly switched from pursuing accession alone to a joint bid with Kazakhstan and Belarus. The move was widely attributed to a personal decision by Mr Putin, taken without the knowledge of Mr Medvedev’s closest advisers or, possibly, even the president himself.

The problem illustrates the curious nature of politics in Russia today, a hybrid of formal democracy and informal autocracy, where elections happen but their results are decided in advance. Russian leaders prize stability, which makes the open succession question pernicious. Both form and substance matter – including the way change is presented to the public and to the rest of the world.

With Russia’s economic crisis already on the political back-burner as the first green shoots of growth start to appear, the focus of the political and economic elite has turned to the relationship between Mr Putin and Mr Medvedev. Close observers have noticed strains. Virtually the only time they have spent together in public in the past few months was in August, when they mugged for television cameras while relaxing and playing badminton in the resort town of Sochi.

“They wanted to show they could get along together,” says Mikhail Fishman, editor of the Russian language edition of Newsweek magazine, “but all they did was show that they wanted to show they could get along together. It just confirmed what everyone was thinking.”

Mr Putin is in the middle of a concerted campaign to boost his media presence – displaying his muscled torso while holidaying in Siberia with photographers never far away.

But Mr Medvedev, a friend of the prime minister’s from their days in St Petersburg local politics, seems determined to launch his own political brand. This month he set out a vision of Russia in a widely publicised internet article, in which he painted a fairly bleak picture, pointing out the country’s economic inefficiency, corruption and “semi-Soviet” social system. It can be read as a manifesto that implicitly criticises Mr Putin for failing to deal with such challenges.

The article went further than before in its veiled criticism of Mr Putin’s approach. “Society is becoming more open and transparent, even if this displeases the ruling class,” was one notable line.

In last week’s meeting with Russia experts, Mr Medvedev seemed to take a further poke at his mentor. “It’s easier for me to talk about business, as I was never in the KGB. I worked in business for 10 years, so I can talk about this with some knowledge of the subject,” he said, referring to the prime minister’s Soviet secret police past.

While Mr Putin presided over more than eight years of increasingly authoritarian rule and erosion of democratic freedoms, Mr Medvedev has been pushing liberal causes – within certain limits. He gave his first Russian newspaper interview to Novaya Gazeta, an opposition publication that has suffered a string of assassinations, including that of the crusading journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006.

The prime minister has been silent on these moves, though some former Putin officials who stayed in the Kremlin, say people close to the situation, opposed the decision to meet Novaya Gazeta. Last week Mr Putin seemed to hit

back when he visited a factory and told a worker: “It would be dishonest to just hustle around and promise everything to everyone. We’ve already been through that before.”

It was perhaps a reminder that the president must be careful. As Mr Simes says: “The trouble for Medvedev is that, while he is distancing himself from Putin, he has to remember that he has an electorate of one. And that electorate is Putin.”

Gleb Pavlovsky, a senior Kremlin political consultant, says the two men have not decided yet who will be the candidate – and hence the president – in 2012. “There is no star chamber, no board of directors which decides this...They are hoping the choice will be an obvious one.”

But he adds Mr Putin cannot simply elbow Mr Medvedev out of the way as this would damage the legitimacy of a fragile political system, potentially creating schisms. “The year before last, Putin could take the decision by himself as to who would succeed him as candidate for president. But it seems to me that now he does not have such a free hand,” says Mr Pavlovsky. “If he wanted to put himself forward, he would have to have some real basis for this. He would have to publicly declare the reason for this.”

Kremlin-watchers are divided. Some say they believe the Putin-Medvedev relationship is a stitch-up, with the prime minister set to return to the presidency. Watching Kremlin politics is like watching a Hollywood film, they say – plenty of suspense but the ending is never in doubt. According to this script, both men have an interest in spinning the intrigue as it gives the illusion of pluralism – and, more importantly, because neither wants to be seen as a lame duck, which would wipe out his influence overnight.

Others, however, believe things are pretty much as they seem in the Kremlin, that the competition between Putin and Medvedev is genuine. More importantly, even the illusion of competition creates the fact of political competition for subordinates who want to push their own agendas.

Friction between the two men’s staffs is obvious, says Mr Simes. “People around Medvedev are clearly trying to pressure Medvedev into establishing his own persona, his own political brand,” says Mr Simes. “The idea is to position him as being tough on foreign policy issues, acceptable to the nationalists, but more modern and more sophisticated [than Putin].”

It is hard to imagine that Mr Medvedev will go further than Mr Putin will allow. Few doubt that Mr Putin will prevail if there is a disagreement. As Cliff Kupchan, of Eurasia Group, a US-based consultancy, who participated in the Russia experts’ meetings with Mr Putin and Mr Medvedev, says: “Medvedev was confident in staking out his turf but gave no indication that he was at odds with Putin.”

Most people assume that the presidency in 2012 is still Mr Putin’s for the taking if he wants it. The latest poll, by the Moscow-based Public Opinion Foundation, puts Mr Putin’s popularity at 71 per cent, with Medvedev’s at a healthy but not stellar 60 per cent.

After Mr Putin’s eight years as president, most senior bureaucrats owe their jobs to the prime minister, while Mr Medvedev has made very few appointments of his own. In Russia, where informal loyalty rather than formal institutions are the currency of power, this is a critical obstacle for Mr Medvedev. The president, who at 44 is young enough to look forward to perhaps another 30 years in politics, has ample time to wait his turn to be his own man.

Though Mr Medvedev has the constitutional power to fire Mr Putin, 56, should he want to, the prime minister’s informal power is untouchable. If he becomes president again in 2012, he will be constitutionally entitled to two more terms and – following a constitutional amendment to extend presidential terms from four to six years – have the right to stay in power until 2024. The resolution of the “2012 problem” will have long-lasting consequences.

US defence move elevates Medvedev to diplomatic rainmaker-in-chief

When Washington announced in mid-September its decision to scrap its east European missile shield, Russia rejoiced. But one Russian rejoiced more than anyone else. Barack Obama, US president, had handed Dmitry Medvedev, his Russian counterpart, a gift – one on which he was quick to capitalise on the news that night.

Mr Medvedev claimed, with some credibility, that his careful diplomacy had produced a breakthrough in relations and a US concession. "I discussed this subject with the president of the United States in the course of our meetings in London and Moscow," he said on Thursday evening, and thanked Mr Obama for "a crucial step towards implementing our agreement".

By contrast Vladimir Putin, prime minister, commented only the following day, calling the US decision "brave" but then demanding further US concessions on World Trade Organisation membership. He seemed out of the loop, crashing a party to which he had not been invited.

Though few in Russia doubt Mr Putin is the behind-the-scenes arbiter on foreign policy, when Mr Medvedev heads to New York to meet Mr Obama again on Wednesday, his prestige will be at an all-time high thanks to his new status as chief rainmaker.

Kremlin-watchers in Moscow, where nothing is attributed to coincidence, are wondering aloud whether the US preference for dealing with Mr Medvedev is an attempt to build him up as a counterweight to Mr Putin.

While the two insist they are running the country as a double act, the statements last week that both are considering a run for the presidency in 2012 has added to speculation that the competition between them is heating up.

The possibility that the US is playing them off against each other was already much discussed in Moscow in June, after Mr Obama criticised Mr Putin and as much as said he preferred Mr Medvedev. "I think that it's important that, even as we move forward with President Medvedev, that Putin understand that the old cold war approaches to US-Russian relations is outdated – that it's time to move forward in a different direction," he said. "I think Medvedev understands that."

US and European leaders have made no secret of the fact that they would like to see the back of Mr Putin, who they feel is needlessly confrontational on foreign policy. Over the years he has managed to annoy most world leaders – for example, baiting Tony Blair, former UK prime minister, on several occasions – and last year threatening to castrate a French journalist at a press conference.

"He forces you to go down to his level or look weak," one diplomat put it.

But Sergei Rogov, director of the Institute for the USA and Canadian Studies in Moscow, says he believes the US sees Putin as indispensable. "What matters is not who one likes or dislikes, but who can deliver," he says, discounting speculation that the US is playing games.

"This would be a risky endeavour and would be counter-productive if they want to achieve results. And I think they want to achieve results."

#7

Next Massachusetts Senator An Ultimate Insider

By Chuck McCutcheon

CQ Today, September 24, 2009

Paul G. Kirk Jr. has spent most of his life in politics, rising from Senate aide to Democratic National Committee chairman and later co-chairing the Commission on Presidential Debates. But he has kept himself outside the spotlight and is known as a calm and cautious strategist. An associate of Kirk's told The New York Times in 1985: "Behind that quiet exterior is a quiet interior."

Kirk's public profile was boosted Thursday when he agreed to temporarily fill the Senate seat vacated by the death of Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts. In addition to working as a Kennedy aide from 1969 to 1977 and serving as national political director for the senator's abortive 1980 presidential campaign, Kirk is chairman of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation's board of directors.

“Paul was my dad’s most loyal guy,” said Kennedy’s son, Rhode Island Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, who reportedly joined other family members in lobbying Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick in selecting Kirk until a special Senate election is held in January. “My dad thought the world of Paul. I think the world of Paul.”

Kennedy family members chose Kirk to serve as master of ceremonies at the senator’s August memorial service. “I have never met anyone whose spirits were not uplifted by being in the company of Ted Kennedy . . . Sen. Kennedy was the most thoughtful, genuinely considerate human being I’ve ever known,” Kirk told mourners.

Party Builder

During Kirk’s four years as head of the Democratic Party, he was credited with reviving state organizations, greatly improving Democratic fund-raising capabilities and striving to unite an organization that had to cope with Republican President Ronald Reagan’s ascendancy. He diminished the influence of special-interest caucuses, a move that some interest groups initially resisted but eventually acknowledged was necessary.

Kirk won praise from Southern Democrats who had regarded him as a “Kennedy liberal” when he first took office; they said he met regularly with them and listened to their concerns. Al From, director of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, also said in 1989 that Kirk did a “terrific job.”

At last year’s Democratic National Convention, Kirk said he had sought to make many of the changes that DNC Chairman Howard Dean subsequently enacted in seeking to make Democrats more competitive across the nation rather than just its usual geographic strongholds. “It’s something that some of us tried to do early on with state parties, but that was before a lot of highly sophisticated technological databases and tools were available, and I think Howard has taken advantage of those tools,” he said.

Kirk took the DNC job after serving as its treasurer shortly after Democrats were embarrassed in Reagan’s 1984 landslide re-election. Among his early competitors for the post was former California Democratic Chairwoman Nancy Pelosi, now House Speaker. Pelosi withdrew from the race before the final vote and threw her support to former North Carolina Gov. Terry Sanford, whom Kirk defeated by more than 50 votes.

In a February 1985 speech, he decried those who “suggest we have to become more like Republicans if we are to survive as a political party.” He moved quickly to set up a Democratic Policy Commission made up of governors, mayors, members of Congress and state officials. Upon leaving the job, he said his only regret was not being able to win the White House in 1988; the losing candidate, then-Massachusetts Gov. Michael S. Dukakis, was reportedly also a finalist to fill Kennedy’s Senate seat.

Lawyer, Kennedy Aide, Lobbyist

Kirk was born in Newton, Mass., a Boston suburb. His father, a judge, served as a justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court for 10 years before retiring in 1970. The younger Kirk graduated from Harvard in 1960, where he played football, and Harvard Law School in 1964. His early contact with the Kennedys came while working on Robert F. Kennedy’s 1968 presidential bid.

After Robert Kennedy’s assassination, Kirk considered quitting politics, according to news accounts. But he moved to Washington to become Edward Kennedy’s chief legislative and political strategist.

He left in 1977 to practice law again, but when the senator opted to run against President Jimmy Carter in 1980, Kirk joined him. He helped negotiate a compromise between the Kennedy and Carter camps on a jobs section of the party platform at the Democratic National Convention that year.

After Kennedy lost the nomination, Kirk returned to practicing law before joining the DNC. During his time as chairman, he joined with his Republican counterpart, Frank Fahrenkopf, in forming the independent Commission on Presidential Debates. The two have continued to lead the organization, serving as intermediaries between rival presidential staffs trying to dictate the terms of debates to their advantage.

Upon leaving the DNC, Kirk briefly toyed with running for Massachusetts governor in 1990. But he instead served as chairman from 1992 to 2001 of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide.

In that role, Kirk led a delegation of Americans who observed the 1988 Mexican elections. "It was a great step forward for Mexico," he told National Public Radio in August.

Kirk also did lobbying work in the 1990s as chairman and chief executive officer of Kirk & Associates Inc., a business advisory and consulting firm. The Boston Globe reported that he was paid \$35,000 to represent the pharmaceutical company Hoechst Marion Roussel on legislation before the Senate in 1999, according to federal disclosure records. He is currently on the board of directors of the Hartford Insurance Group.

Kirk also organized and led the successful efforts of a group of Boston-area business and community leaders in 1999 to prevent the New England Patriots football team from moving from Foxboro, Mass., to Hartford, Conn. He has maintained an avid interest in sports; in 1993 he was reportedly considered as Major League Baseball commissioner and in 2004 wrote an Op-Ed for the Boston Globe arguing that baseball great Pete Rose should not be allowed to enter the Hall of Fame for his acknowledged gambling on the sport.

"Baseball is that treasured game at which little boys dream of their manhood and old men dream of their boyhood," Kirk wrote. "It is an early teacher of some of life's most important lessons . . . It's where we were first taught that there are consequences for not playing by the rules."

#8

EU Signals Readiness To Resume Full Ties With Moldova

By Ahto Lobjakas

RFE/RL, September 25, 2009

BRUSSELS -- The European Union has signaled it's ready to resume full cooperation with Moldova following the appointment of a new, liberal-led government and Chisinau's recent decision to normalize relations with neighboring Romania.

Diplomats in Brussels say they believe Moldova is ready for a new cooperation treaty that could lead to visa-free travel and free trade.

EU foreign and security policy chief Javier Solana has invited the country's new prime minister, Vlad Filat, to visit Brussels next week together with his top ministers.

EU-Moldovan relations have been on hold since parliamentary elections in April precipitated riots and a political crisis that led to a repeat poll on July 29. Mostly young protesters accused the ruling Communist Party of fixing the April elections following eight years of corrupt rule.

Moldova is a member of the EU's Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, but has seen no benefit from either project in the past months.

The EU's current Swedish presidency on September 25 welcomed the new government's appointment in a statement, saying it was an "essential first step" toward enabling Moldova to tackle "critical challenges."

The statement said the EU hopes a climate of "responsible cooperation will prevail" in Moldova's politics.

EU sources say Moldova's recent decision to reverse a visa requirement for Romanian citizens in the wake of April's unrest -- which then-President Vladimir Voronin blamed on Bucharest -- did much to clear the air.

Romania was the only EU member whose citizens needed visas to enter Moldova. Romania had retaliated by informally blocking most EU-Moldova contacts.

An EU delegation is now set to travel to Moldova in early October to explore kick-starting negotiations over Moldova's pro-Moscow breakaway region of Transdniester.

Later in the month, a ministerial-level EU meeting in Brussels is expected launch talks over a new treaty with Moldova.

Officials in Brussels say there's broad sympathy within the EU for Moldova's urgent pleas for visa-free travel. Most member states, together with the executive European Commission, agree talks on the issue would provide a useful "political gesture" in support of Filat's fledgling government.

EU officials have warned that Moldova's political stability remains precarious, especially because of country's dire economic situation.

A \$500 million budget shortfall threatens to bankrupt the country. The EU officials say they're prepared to prop up Chisinau's budget in the short term until an International Monetary Fund can negotiate a bridging loan.

#9

75 years on, Jews in Russia's Jewish autonomous district hold on

By Grant Slater

JTA, September 25, 2009

BIROBIDZHAN, Russia -- The diminutive leader of the handful of Orthodox Jews in this nominally Jewish district of Russia, 90-year-old Dov Kofman, e-mailed his friend and benefactor in Tokyo to say he could go on no longer.

Kofman was planning to return to Israel and would pass on to his protege, Alexander Kleinerman, control of the Torah scroll that the Jewish community in Japan had provided, as well as the keys to the paint-slathered lean-to where his congregation worships.

"I am confident that the community Beit Tshoova will live," Kofman wrote in his e-mail last week.

Beit Tshoova's shul is situated on the outskirts of Birobidzhan, the capital of Russia's Jewish Autonomous Region and a relic of a misguided Soviet plan to resettle Jews in the far east of Russia, near the Chinese border, in the 1930s.

Kofman's departure says something about the enigmatic nature of this Jewish capital on this, its 75th anniversary. The town of 80,000 is developing quickly by Russian standards, and there is a newer synagogue and Jewish community center off the main square.

But at times there is a sense that the veneer of Judaism in Birobidzhan is no thicker than the fresh coat of paint applied citywide for the anniversary festivities. Political expediency and regional independence seem more likely motives for an emphasis on Jewish culture and government placards printed in Yiddish than the region's dwindling Jewish population, which now stands at about 5 percent.

The town receives a cultural budget from the government in Moscow each year to sustain Jewish activities like an International Jewish Cultural Festival the week before the anniversary. In mid-September, the Jewish educational organization Limmud held a conference here.

Nearly 4,000 miles from Moscow, the Jewish Autonomous Region is unique among the patchwork of entities that makes up the Russian Federation. All other autonomous regions were declared independent republics with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Mikhail Chlenov, the secretary general of the Eurasian Jewish Congress, said that Birobidzhan and its environs are not strong enough to be a republic. Fearful of stepping on Israel's toes with the creation of another Jewish state, Chlenov called the region's status "a delicate matter."

"It was not easy to start and it will be more difficult to eliminate," Chlenov said as his car sped past the remnants of collective farms where Yiddish-speaking settlers attempted to tame the mosquito-plagued swamps 75 years before.

A wave of Jewish immigrants traveled the thousands of miles from European Russia or further in the mid-1930s to settle here. But many left the district after the verdant promises of Soviet propaganda yielded to the reality of harsh winters and swampy terrain. Still others left when a more hospitable Jewish homeland came into existence: Israel.

Today, however, the region is on the cusp of an economic boom. By 2014 or before, a rail bridge across the Amur River will carry granular iron and other metals from Russia into China, with its booming economy. The bridge is the first border crossing constructed together by the Russian and Chinese governments, and only the third bridge to be built across the border.

It's not clear, however, whether this will bolster the region's Jewish spirit.

Though Birobidzhan always resembled other Soviet towns of similar size, its Jewish character made it unique. Yiddish is an official language here. Statues of Jewish violinists and accordion players dot the city. A golden menorah presides over the fountain in front of the train station, and Tevya from "Fiddler on the Roof" is frozen in bronze on his nearby haywagon – a Jewish Disneyland.

"All this is beautiful, but people have started to live worse," said Igor Magadenko, a retired lawyer, who relaxed recently with visiting friends from Israel on a new riverwalk built for the 75th anniversary. "There are no jobs, and the wolves in the government are hunting the profits from the new bridge."

Marina Gitikh lives in a ramshackle two-room house where the first Jewish collective farm here was founded in the late 1920s. Unemployed, she lives with her elderly mother and a son from her second marriage.

"We won't go to the city for the anniversary," she said as she poured beer from a five-liter bottle into a teacup. "Why should we celebrate with those people when there aren't better houses or jobs for us? There's no work anywhere."

Rabbi Mordechai Sheiner, a Chabad emissary who arrived in Birobidzhan in 2002, just before the new synagogue was completed six years ago, said that the community is going through hard times. Chabad suffered a funding crisis last year when its main donor lost a significant portion of his wealth.

Roman Leder, the head of the community that runs the new synagogue and community center, said Chabad's funding to the city was cut in half.

The biggest benefactor of the Jewish community there, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, warned of impending cuts but they never came. The nine community groups supported by the center continued unscathed, he said.

The city of Birobidzhan provides free heating to the two buildings despite laws prohibiting it, Leder said.

Daniel Turk, the president of the Jewish Community of Japan, said his group provided a Torah to the elderly Orthodox Jews in Birobidzhan out of a sense of charity and, in part, to provide the community with a source of religious support other than Chabad.

Despite the obvious challenges, the Jews of Birobidzhan have kept Judaism alive in this remote corner of the earth.

Three decades ago, when this was still part of the Soviet Union, Chlenov recalls being approached by a waiter who appeared to be Jewish. Quietly, he invited Chlenov to Shabbat prayers.

"We have no shul," the waiter said, "but we have a minyan."

#10

Russia still cool on new U.S. anti-missile scheme

By Conor Sweeney

Reuters, September 29, 2009

MOSCOW - Russia remains suspicious about Washington's new anti-missile plans and fears its strategic nuclear weapons could still be threatened by the reconfigured scheme, the country's envoy to NATO said on Tuesday.

Dmitry Rogozin's comments showed Moscow's distrust as it awaits details on Pentagon plans to create new mobile interceptor missiles, dropping an earlier U.S. scheme to set up fixed bases in Poland and the Czech Republic.

"Where are the guarantees that this mobile thing, be it a boat, a cruiser, or a battleship with a mounted missile-defense system and with missile interceptors, will not sail into our northern seas?" Rogozin said at a press briefing.

Russia opposed the original U.S. plans because it did not believe assurances from Washington that they were directed at future missile launches from countries like Iran. It feared the scheme would target its own arsenal, upsetting the strategic nuclear weapons balance in Europe.

Rogozin said Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev gave a guarded welcome to U.S. President Barack Obama's decision to alter the earlier Bush administration plan. But he said Moscow needed assurances it was not still the target.

Under Obama's new plan, the United States would initially deploy ships with missile interceptors and in a second phase would field land-based defense systems.

A former politician, Rogozin is based in Brussels, where he represents Russia's interests at NATO headquarters, but is considered well connected within Moscow's power structures.

The Pentagon says it only wants to target small and medium-range missiles from other countries, but Moscow needs convincing the system will not threaten the 3,000-plus Russian strategic warheads still pointing at U.S. and NATO countries.

Russia would be concerned if the new sea-based interceptors are based in Arctic waters, the North Sea or the Baltic Sea as this would imply that the trajectories of Russian ballistic missiles could be tracked.

"We need guarantees that the parameters of deploying these anti-missile (interceptors) will in fact be restricted to small-and medium-range missiles and that they will not encroach on those territories that have serious heavy ground-based or submarine-launched ballistic missiles," Rogozin said.

The United States says the interceptors are intended to counter a potential threat from Iranian short- and medium-range missiles. U.S. intelligence now believes Iran is unlikely to have a long-range missile until between 2015 and 2020.

#11

U.S. OSCE Official Says Dialogue Best Way To Spread Democracy

RFE/RL, September 29, 2009

BRUSSELS -- Michael Haltzel, a professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, heads the U.S. delegation at the OSCE's "Human Dimension" workshop taking place in Warsaw on September 28-29. In an interview with RFE/RL correspondent Ahto Lobjakas, he says engagement remains the best way to tackle difficult regimes. He also says he hopes to see gradual progress in those post-Soviet nations where human rights abuses remain regular and democratic standards have yet to take root.

RFE/RL: The OSCE's Chairman-in-Office next year, Kazakhstan, has a rather patchy democratic record at best -- less than free and fair elections, pending legislation for a president for life, and rife rights abuses. How will the elevation of such a nation to leadership status affect the OSCE?

Michael Haltzel: It's a challenge. I mentioned it this morning in my opening statement. Other speakers alluded to it without actually mentioning it by name. There was a silent protest when the representative of Kazakhstan gave her opening speech. This was because of the imprisonment of Yevgeny Zhovtis, who's a human rights worker. It's a criminal case having to do with a fatal car accident [and] there is concern about his treatment. So, people understand that this is a real challenge for them and we hope that Kazakhstan can rise to the occasion.

RFE/RL: Kazakh officials have said in the past that the OSCE needs an injection of "Asian values." Do you think that is the case?

Haltzel: No. I think that people all over the world have the same attachment to human values, to human rights. I think North Americans, Europeans, and Central Asians -- the average person still wants to have freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly, and freedom from torture, and all of the other values that are outlined in the OSCE.

And don't forget -- all the countries, all 56 participating states in the OSCE, [which], of course, is the largest regional organization in the world encompassing close to 900 million people, they all signed on the dotted line -- [or] their governments did. This is nothing that is being imposed on anybody. The government signed, and it's a solemn pledge, and it's not imposed and there is nothing to with geography -- east of Vienna, west of Vienna, or anything like that at all.

RFE/RL: Who's meant to enforce this, to make sure that everyone in practice adheres to the same set of values?

Haltzel: This is a [voluntary] exercise. There is no world government and whether it's the OSCE or the United Nations or any other organization, obviously, enforcement is done by the powers that be. And one hopes that discussions like the 'Human Dimension Implementation Meeting' will have an effect on the governments -- but there is no world government. That's just not there. I think behavior has been changed in the past and we hope that will be the case in the future. It's not just Kazakhstan -- no government has a perfect record in these things.

RFE/RL: Speaking of the "human dimension" -- what difference do efforts by the EU and the United States, and possibly others, to conduct human rights dialogues and civil society outreach programs actually make in countries like the Central Asian nations, or Belarus?

Haltzel: This is a fair question and, again, it gets back to the enforcement issue. It would be nice if one could say one has an international organization, be it a regional one like the OSCE, or an almost universal one like the United Nations -- when they decreed something that there'd be instantaneous acceptance by all parties. That's not the way the world works. There's no magic formula.

There's a whole series of ways that governments can be influenced. There's [what] some people have called 'shaming,' I'm not sure that's the right word, but it's not good to be called upon the carpet, so to speak, at an international meeting and [other] countries going into detail.

Of course, one of the great advantages of HDIM -- the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE -- is that nongovernmental organizations have status here. And they speak and give everyone the benefit of their expertise. There are side events which are not in the plenary sessions -- the program is full of them. There are obviously discussions, bilateral meetings. I have bilateral meetings set up as head of the U.S. delegation [and] with 20 other delegation heads.

We just came from a luncheon with the head of the EU delegation here, [its] Swedish presidency, and talked about all sorts of important issues. So -- yes, there are different ways to pressure, obviously the whole OSCE is one part of a whole, one part of a puzzle whereby the national governments and non-governmental organizations attempt to influence each other.

It's a complex process, I know it sounds frustrating, it is frustrating both for journalists and diplomats and for the average citizen alike -- that sometimes progress is frustratingly slow, painfully slow. But I think they have to put things into perspective.

RFE/RL: Do you think RFE/RL's listeners in Central Asia and elsewhere will see the benefits of that progress within their lifetime?

Haltzel: I certainly hope so. In my opening statement today I mentioned the fact that one of the governments had recently blocked FM broadcasting of RFE/RL and the BBC. We're obviously pushing for [them to resume]. But again, I want to re-emphasize that the OSCE, important as it is, is only one piece in the puzzle.

There are any number of other ways, there are bilateral relations between the United States and each of these governments. There are relations between the EU and individual EU states and these governments. There are a host of economic and political [issues which] come into play. I would only say that the OSCE is an important element in this picture.

RFE/RL: From your point of view, are powers like the EU and the United States best advised to engage difficult regimes like those in Central Asia, or should they opt for sanctions more often?

Haltzel: I'm always in favor of engagement. I think if we talk only to our best friends, it's kind of futile. We should engage, we can calibrate the level of engagement, we can do any number of things that way. But if we don't talk to people with whom we have disagreements, we'll continue to have disagreements. So, yes, I'm completely for engagement.

#12

Two Armenian Opposition Parties To Campaign Jointly Against Draft Agreements With Turkey

By Liz Fuller, Anush Martirosian, Ruzanna Stepanian

RFE/RL, September 29, 2009

The widespread public outcry in Yerevan triggered by the publication one month ago of two draft protocols intended to pave the way for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey shows no sign of abating.

On the contrary, on September 28 even some leading members of President Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party of Armenia informed Sarkisian about their reservations concerning unspecified aspects of the ongoing rapprochement between the two countries, and requested "clarification."

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on September 27 that the two countries' foreign ministers, Eduard Nalbandian and Ahmet Davutoglu, would initial the two draft protocols at a meeting on October 10 in Zurich. Switzerland mediated the talks between the two sides that resulted first, in the announcement in April of agreement on a "road map" for normalizing bilateral relations and then, on August 31, the unveiling of the two draft protocols.

The two draft protocols deal respectively with the establishment of, and the subsequent development of, formal diplomatic relations between the two countries; the second one stipulates that the border between the two countries will be opened within two months after ratification of the twin protocols by the two countries' parliaments.

Stepan Safarian, a senior member of the opposition Zharangutiun (Heritage) party, told a press conference in Yerevan on September 28 that Zharangutiun and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation--Dashnaktsutiun (HHD) have reached a "tentative agreement" on launching protest actions both within and outside parliament. The two parties between them control 23 of the 131 seats in the National Assembly.

The HHD objections focus on the provision of the second protocol under which Armenia formally recognizes its current border with Turkey, and also to the planned formation of a Turkish-Armenian panel tasked with studying the 1915-18 mass killings and deportations of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The HHD party program still lists

among its objectives bringing back under Armenian hegemony territories in present-day Turkey and Georgia that were part of the short-lived independent Armenian state between 1918-20, and constraining the present-day Turkish leadership to agree to reparations for surviving victims or their descendants.

Zharangutian for its part wants the two draft protocols put to a nationwide referendum. The party's chairman, Raffi Hovannisian, who served under then-President Levon Ter-Petrossian as foreign minister in 1992-93, reaffirmed that demand on September 29 in an open letter to President Sarkisian. Safarian said that if his party might launch a campaign for Sarkisian's resignation if the authorities fail to accede to that demand.

A second former Armenian foreign minister, Vartan Oskanian, has similarly rejected the two draft protocols, terming them "defeatist." Speaking on September 22 in Yerevan, Oskanian affirmed that "We want relations with Turkey, but we want them with a Turkey that wants equal and reciprocal relations with Armenia." But, Oskanian continued, the wording of the protocols "give Turkey what it has wanted for 18 years," meaning recognition of the present border and renunciation of Armenia's campaign for international recognition of the 1915 killings as genocide. Oskanian noted that there is, moreover, no guarantee that, once the protocols have been initialed and cannot be amended, the Turkish parliament will not refuse to ratify them.

Sarkisian, for his part, defended the wording of the draft agreements during a five-hour meeting on September 17 with pro-government political parties. Most opposition parties boycotted that meeting. Sarkisian plans to meet with Armenian diaspora representatives in Russia, France, the United States, and Lebanon in early October to solicit their views on the draft protocols.

Ter-Petrossian's Armenian National Congress (HAK) was swift to hail publication of the draft protocols as reflecting "substantial progress" toward the normalization of bilateral relations. At the same time, the HAK too rejected as "unacceptable" the establishment of a Turkish-Armenian panel of experts tasked with assessing the 1915 massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and the provision whereby the Turkish-Armenian agreements will take effect only after being ratified by the parliaments of the two countries. It said that allows Ankara to delay indefinitely the reopening of the Turkish-Armenian border.

#13

Putin Sounds Welcoming Tone to Foreign Investors

By Andrew E. Kramer

New York Times, September 30, 2009

MOSCOW — Russia's prime minister, Vladimir V. Putin, whose government took control of several oil companies when he served as president, gave a speech Tuesday saying the state must now step back from the economy and let private enterprise take the lead in pulling Russia out of recession.

The speech, at a banking forum in Moscow, echoed recent assurances by his ministers and economic advisors that Russia is becoming more attentive to the concerns of investors. Mr. Putin also reiterated their suggestions that a new round of privatizations could be in the cards for Russia.

The speech on economic policy was noteworthy for its exceptionally warm endorsement of a role for private investors. That had not been the case in recent years.

"We understand how deceptive blind faith in an omnipotent state is, how illusory are the hopes that total intervention in economic life might fix everything and put everything in its place," Mr. Putin said.

He went on to praise private enterprise. "To the extent that the situation stabilizes, that the effects of the crisis are overcome, we plan to consistently and purposefully reduce state intervention in the economy," he said, adding that a new round of privatizations could follow.

The government already has been extending an olive branch to the petroleum industry, offering new investments and a greater role in a sector at a meeting with oil company executives last week.

Mr. Putin noted that, while the government inevitably took stakes in Russian companies during the crisis, it did not use the downturn to impose greater controls and did not restrict the free conversion of the ruble.

“We will continue the line of encouraging private initiative, integration into the global economy and the creation of a favorable investment climate,” he said.

In his first term as president, from 2000 until 2004, Mr. Putin had introduced a number of pro-business reforms such as a flat tax and a streamlined system for registering small enterprises, but followed this in his second term with a sweeping extension of state control over the natural resources companies during the boom.

On Tuesday, Mr. Putin took a different line. Russia may eventually liberalize even the trade in natural gas, though a monopoly would remain with Gazprom for exports for at least the medium term, he said.

During the oil boom, export revenues exploded and foreign investors rushed to pile on to the economic expansion. If anything, the government struggled with the problem of too much money, sparking inflation and making local products uncompetitive with imported goods.

That reversed last autumn, and Russia is now again in a position of having to compete for limited investor money with other emerging economies.

“Now, with capital around the world much more scarce, there’s a recognition that Russia does have to play the game,” Rory MacFarquhar, an economist at Goldman Sachs’s office in Moscow, said in a telephone interview. “It does have to make overtures to foreign investors and it cannot take them for granted.”

In one sign of some stabilization in the Russian economy, the Central Bank on Tuesday lowered its refinancing rate for the second time in two weeks, indicating it is less worried now about a run on the ruble and can instead focus on trying to stimulate lending to businesses.

#14

Ukrainian Jews mark Babi Yar JTA, September 29, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Ukrainian Jews held two ceremonies in Kiev to remember the Jewish victims of the Babi Yar massacre.

Sunday's dueling ceremonies, according to some observers, illustrate the lack of unity within the Jewish community of Kiev and Ukraine on the eve of upcoming presidential elections.

Members of the Kiev Jewish community, rabbis and diplomats attended Sunday's main ceremony near the menorah-shaped Holocaust memorial erected in 1991 at the site of the Babi Yar massacre. More than 100,000 Jews were killed there by Nazi gunmen and local collaborators.

Among the participants were Zina Kalay-Kleitman, Israel's ambassador to Ukraine; Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, a chief rabbi of Ukraine; and Evgeniy Chervonenko, first deputy mayor of Kiev and a Jewish leader in Ukraine. Students of Jewish schools also participated.

Chervonenko announced at the ceremony that Kiev Mayor Leonid Chernovetzky had vetoed a plan to build a hotel at the Babi Yar site.

At the same time, the Jewish Forum of Ukraine, the Anti-Fascist Committee and the Association of Former Prisoners of Concentration Camps and Ghettos joined with left-wing political parties for a ceremony nearby at a monument to all the victims of Babi Yar.

Both events culminated in memorial prayers led by Bleich at the menorah, and by Rabbi Aleksandr Dukhovny, spiritual leader of the Ukrainian Reform Jewish movement at the monument to all victims of Babi Yar.

Iliya Levitas, head of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, told JTA that the meeting at the monument to all the victims of Babi Yar was an attempt to split the Jewish community.

"Traditionally the [entire] Jewish community marks Holocaust Memorial Day on this day," he said.

The ceremonies memorialized more than 33,700 Ukrainian Jews killed over two days in September 1941, when occupying Nazi troops forced local Jews into a ravine at Babi Yar and then shot them to death. The Nazis also murdered thousands of Red Army prisoners of war, members of the Ukrainian national resistance movement, gypsies and mentally disabled people there.

In more recent years, Babi Yar came to symbolize Soviet attempts to suppress Jewish identity. When a memorial to the victims was erected there 35 years after the tragedy, it mentioned only "citizens of Kiev and prisoners of war."

On Tuesday morning, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, Vice Premier Ivan Vasyunyk and other officials laid flowers at the monument to all the victims of Babi Yar.

Later in the day, diplomats, Holocaust survivors and other Ukrainian Jews, as well as representatives of ethnic and religious groups, commemorated the killings.

In the evening, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament Nikolay Tomenko, and parliament and Cabinet ministers also laid flowers at the monument to the Babi Yar victims and to the memorial of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists victims, according to the Ukrinform state news agency.

#15

Synagogue Ushers in New Era of Services for Russia's Inmates

By Tamar Runyan

Chabad.org, September 30, 2009

For High Holiday services this year, Jewish inmates in northern Russia's Ertsevo prison made history when they prayed in the sprawling country's first on-site synagogue, a worship space they helped build. And as they turn their eyes to the fast-approaching holiday of Sukkot, plans in the works call for similar inmate-built synagogues to pop up at correctional institutions in the near future.

According to Rabbi Aaron Gurevitch, a Chabad-Lubavitch emissary who directs the Federation of Jewish Communities' Department for Cooperation With the Military, Ministry of Emergency Affairs and Law Enforcement Agencies, the new synagogue is significant, given the diffusion of Jewish prisoners across a correctional system that spans the continent of Asia and part of Europe. Although he estimated the Jewish inmate population at around 1,000 people, any one prison, on average, has no more than two or three Jewish inmates. At Ertsevo, located in the remote Arkhangelsk region close to the Arctic Circle, there are 11 such prisoners.

"We managed to give Jewish prisoners the perfect gift for Rosh Hashanah," remarked Gurevitch, who also leads FJC efforts on behalf of Jewish soldiers in Russia. The prisoners "built everything themselves: a prayer stand, menorahs, benches, anything from wood."

The inmates even painted colorful murals on the synagogue's walls.

Chabad-Lubavitch rabbinical students from Moscow conducted services at Ertsevo for Rosh Hashanah, but the prisoners led their own Yom Kippur services eight days later using prayer shawls and books sent to them by the FJC.

In an interview Wednesday, Gurevitch stated that other prisons are keen to get their own synagogues.

The desire stems from “various reasons, [from] regular correspondence with prisoners, the desire to communicate with local rabbis and community leaders, and prisoners’ interest in meeting regularly for prayer and dialogue,” said Gurevitch.

In the next few months, the prison near Krasnoyarsk, a Siberian city about 15,000 kilometers from the Russian capital, is slated to finish construction on a synagogue to serve its 20 Jewish inmates, the largest such population in the country.

From Literature to Food

At Ertsevo, prisoners are preparing for Sukkot by using their woodworking skills to build a sukkah. In addition, rabbinical students will visit during next week’s eight-day holiday to give the inmates the opportunity to bless the Four Species.

Gurevitch explained that the latest expansion in services for Jewish inmates flows from a 2001 agreement between the FJC and the State Corrections Administration. Under the terms of the agreement, “Jewish inmates are permitted to meet with religious leaders on a regular basis, receive humanitarian aid and literature, and receive health insurance coverage.”

The goal, emphasized the rabbi, is to “rehabilitate prisoners prior to their release from prison.”

Because of the great distance from one prison to the next, Gurevitch counts on the assistance of local Jewish communities to provide necessary services.

In Perm, for instance, Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbi Zalman Deutsch maintains contact with the estimated 15 Jews serving time at the maximum security White Swan prison in Solikamsk, personally mailing them materials ahead of each holiday.

“It is very important to give some kind of internal peace to someone experiencing physical incarceration,” Deutch said last year. “Internal peace is serenity for the soul. We will do everything in our power to provide for the spiritual freedom of Jewish inmates.”

Gurevitch said that because of regulations, many times his staff must make do with postal contact.

“It is forbidden to speak on the phone,” explained the rabbi, whose staff maintains a written correspondence with about 400 prisoners, representing an average of 80 letters a month.

Each month, Gurevitch’s office distributes hundreds of copies of the L’Chaim Jewish magazine to prisons around the country.

Where possible, prisoners can also have access to special shipments of kosher holiday food, such as before Chanukah and Passover. For the most part, however, prisons have not allowed more regular kosher food distributions.

“It is very, very difficult,” said Rabbi Yaakov Fridman, director of Moscow’s Chabad House for Israelis, who has helped Israelis incarcerated in Russia obtain kosher food.

But with the Ertsevo synagogue functioning, and the next one on the way, Gurevitch signaled his hope for the future.

“The newly established prayer room undoubtedly shows a clear improvement in relations between the state and representatives of the Jewish faith in Russia,” said Gurevitch. “We are very pleased that Jews have been given this opportunity.”

#16
Intervention to the 2009 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Working Session on "Fundamental Freedoms"
By Alexander Verkhovsky
SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, September 26, 2009

[On 28 September, 2009, in Warsaw, started the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. It will end on 9 October. The second working session was dedicated to the fundamental freedoms, in particular freedoms of expression, of belief and religion.]

Dear Chairman, dear conference participants.

1. OSCE does not have uniform rules concerning authorities responsible for government's treatment of religion. There is no doubt, however, that legal provisions regulating such authorities and their practices should respect the autonomy of religious associations guaranteed by domestic and international law, and should not violate the freedom of conscience.

Specifically, no government authority is in a position to judge whether the beliefs and practices of a certain religious group are consistent with the beliefs and practices announced by the same group earlier.

2. The specific nature of religious associations and activities should not be interpreted to mean that religious groups are subject to tougher restrictions than everyone else. In reality, however, we often see that investigation and prosecution of actual or alleged offenses differ from the normal law enforcement practices whenever religion is involved.

For example, the Russian authorities are now trying to prohibit one brochure of Falun Gong for criticizing the Chinese government and Communist Party, even though everyone else is free to do so. Or whenever a court bans an organization for extremism, only in cases involving religious organizations may the court refuse to publicize the reason for the judgment, as it was the case when the Russian Supreme Court banned Tablighi Jamaat this July.

Evidently, intergovernmental relations, let alone measures to counteract terrorism and extremism are very important, but minimum standards of equality and human rights of everyone, including members of religious associations, should be respected.

3. This July, I had the honor of attending a meeting in Vienna on the freedom of conscience, where the participating NGOs devoted a large part of their discussion to mutual accusations of attacks against freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, respectively, voiced by NGOs which could be roughly described as proponents and opponents of secularism.

Such arguments rarely lead to consensus, but they can be made much less dramatic by relying primarily on the freedom of expression principle. It would make sense to refrain from attempts to restrict criticism of religion and religiously motivated behavior (the so-called defamation of religion), on the one hand, and to restrict criticism of certain views and behaviors from the religious perspective, on the other. We feel that such mutual restraint could benefit everyone.

In this context, I invite you to support the Athens Declaration signed in December 2008, including by representatives of the UN and OSCE. It reads, specifically, that restrictions on freedom of expression should be limited in scope to the protection of overriding individual rights, and in particular, restrictions on freedom of expression to prevent intolerance should be limited in scope to advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

4. The Athens Declaration should also be supported in its recommendations concerning anti-terrorist legislation.

Recommendations:

To OSCE:

1. Support the Athens Declaration at the level of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Ministers.

To OSCE member states:

1. Refer all decisions to ban certain theological texts or certain religious organizations and groups to the Supreme Court. Ensure maximum publicity of such proceedings due to their particular sensitivity and implications for the freedom of conscience.

2. Eliminate selective enforcement of laws against incitement to hatred with respect of religiously motivated statements.

3. Review and update domestic laws against incitement to hatred in order to ensure freedom of expression related to religion.

#17
Intervention to the 2009 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Working Session on "Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I"
By Galina Kozhevnikova
SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, September 30, 2009

[The SOVA Center for Information and Analysis took part in the 2009 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.]

Dear Chairman, dear conference participants!

In my presentation, I would like to focus on certain problems with law enforcement response to hate crime, which we have observed from the Russian experience.

Underestimation of the problem of hate crime for many years inevitably gives members of violent racist groups a sense of impunity. Their isolated gangs have formed well-organized horizontal networks capable of coordinated actions. In addition to street crime, the ultra-right engage in subversive and terrorist activity both individually and in organized groups.

Therefore, in planning any response to hate crime, it is no longer enough to rely on criminal police skills and methods; rather, new methods must be adopted, capable of destroying the infrastructure of the racist underground, as well as bringing the individual culprits to justice. Lessons learned from counter-terrorist operations will clearly be useful.

The ultra-right activists and ideologists take advantage of mistrust in relations between certain countries to escape actual or potential criminal prosecution for hate propaganda and hate crime. For example, Pyotr Khomyakov facing a criminal investigation in Russia applied for political asylum in Ukraine in the summer of 2009. He is one of the founders and ideologists of the Big Game Project designed to involve the ultra-right youth in hate crime. Yuri Belyaev, a veteran of the Russian neo-Nazi movement, has also moved to Ukraine. When racist activists and ideologists move between countries, the situation in their country of origin does not get any better, while the country of destination may be negatively affected by their activity.

On the contrary, attempts by the officials to negotiate with the ultra-rightwing leaders (as it happened in Moscow, when Kyrgyz diplomats organized meetings with Dmitry Dyomushkin, the leader of the "Slavic Union") do not make things easier, but legalize rightwing activists.

Maintaining reliable statistics of hate crime remains a problem. For example, official statistics in Russia do not keep track of hate incidents, but only of criminal cases where the official charges include the hate motive. No statistical data is available on incidents with suspected hate motives or on victims of such incidents. However, collecting and reporting such data is very important, even for those cases where suspected hate motives are disproven (or not

proven) in court. Firstly, a signal should be sent to the public that the law enforcement agencies are seriously concerned about the problem. Secondly, the public should have a more accurate idea of the real scope of the problem, and thirdly, detailed and comprehensive statistics will encourage consistent investigation of hate crime.

Our recommendations:

To OSCE

1. Summarize and publicize best practices of comprehensive response to organized racist crime, from investigation of individual incidents to detection and destruction of their network infrastructure by cutting off their funding sources, identifying the organizers and coordinators of violent attacks, etc.
2. Organize a seminar for law enforcement personnel of different countries to share and promote best practices in data collection and official statistics of hate crime.

To OSCE member states

1. Consistently use the data provided by NGOs engaged in monitoring racist groups' activity.
2. Encourage and facilitate intergovernmental cooperation in counteraction to hate crime and propaganda.
3. Whenever a request for extradition of someone suspected of hate offenses is questioned, relevant authorities should be advised to consult with NGOs researching hate crime in the country of the suspect's residence and in the country requesting extradition, to verify the grounds for the request.
4. Change the crime reporting system to enable registration of suspected hate motives at any stage of proceedings.
5. Publish comprehensive statistics on hate crimes disaggregated by type, region, and the number of victims.

#18

Israeli diplomat expelled from Russia Jerusalem Post, October 1, 2009

Israeli diplomat Shmuel Polishuk, who serves in Nativ, was forced to urgently leave Moscow after Russian authorities accused him of espionage, it was reported on Thursday.

Israel had pressured Russia to prevent his official expulsion and even threatened a counter move, Ma'ariv reported. According to the report, it was eventually agreed upon that he would not be declared a 'persona non grata' but would have to leave the country.

The Foreign Ministry did not provide any details other than saying that the issue was being examined by the foreign ministries of the two countries.

Nativ is a body that operates under the Prime Minister's Office and its official capacity is to encourage aliya from Russia. In the past, Nativ was part of the intelligence community.

The body was established in 1952 and in the first years of the state's existence worked clandestinely most of the time. It worked to bring Jews living in what was then the Soviet Union closer to Judaism, Zionism and Israel, often operating deep inside the staunchly anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic soviet empire.

Nativ's activities were diminished after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990. In 2006 it was made subordinate to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, then headed by Avigdor Lieberman, who currently serves as foreign minister. When Lieberman's ministry was shut down Nativ was again put under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office.

#19

Georgia Set Off War, Probe Finds Report to E.U. Decries Russian Response By Philip P. Pan Washington Post, October 1, 2009

MOSCOW -- An independent inquiry ordered by the European Union has concluded that Georgia violated international law and triggered last year's war with Russia by attacking the breakaway region of South Ossetia.

In a report released Wednesday that could redefine public views of the five-day war, the European mission also found that Russia's invasion of Georgia after the attack was illegal and unjustified and that Russian-backed Ossetian militias conducted ethnic cleansing of Georgian villages.

"There is no way to assign overall responsibility for the conflict to one side alone," the report concluded. "They all have failed, and it should be their responsibility to make good for it."

The probe into the causes of the August 2008 war was intended to establish an internationally accepted set of facts that might move Russia and Georgia toward a lasting settlement of their differences. But both countries seized on the report to justify their long-standing positions while rejecting those portions that undermined their arguments.

In the most significant finding, the report said Georgia ignited the war after a long period of mounting tensions by shelling the separatist enclave of South Ossetia. The report acknowledged that Russian forces appeared to have entered Georgia before the attack but rejected the Georgian government's claim that a large-scale invasion had necessitated a military response.

"None of the explanations given by the Georgian authorities in order to provide some form of legal justification for the attack" are valid, Heidi Tagliavini, the Swiss diplomat assigned to lead the investigation, said in a statement accompanying the 1,000-page report. "In particular, there was no massive Russian military invasion underway, which had to be stopped by Georgian military forces shelling Tskhinvali," the capital of South Ossetia.

But Tagliavini cautioned that an analysis of the causes of the war should not focus simply on who fired the first shot, noting that Russia escalated tensions and violated international law by giving citizenship to most residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, another breakaway region of Georgia. Any evaluation, she wrote, "has to consider, too, the impact of a great power's coercive politics and diplomacy against a small and insubordinate neighbor," as well as the neighbor's "fear that it might permanently lose important parts of its territory through creeping annexation."

The report is likely to prove damaging to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who has repeatedly asserted that he mobilized troops in response to a Russian invasion and whom critics portray as an autocrat who blundered into a war that could not be won. A favorite of the Bush administration, Saakashvili has been trying to persuade a reluctant Obama administration to provide his nation with defensive arms. Georgia receives more U.S. aid per capita than almost any other country.

Eka Tkeshelashvili, secretary of Georgia's National Security Council, said Tagliavini did a fair job of laying out facts but drew the wrong conclusions. She noted a section of the report that confirms "an influx of volunteers or mercenaries from the territory of the Russian Federation" as well as "the presence of some Russian forces in South Ossetia" before the Georgian attack. The report also said Ossetian militias had attacked Georgian villages.

"Foreign military forces are entering and already present on your territory, and your citizens, thousands of them, are facing death and isolated by heavy bombardment," she said in an interview. "What would any responsible democratic government facing this type of situation do?"

Tagliavini declined interview requests, and it was unclear how she had reached her conclusion that there was no Russian attack. The report said investigators had no access to intelligence reports or satellite imagery from intelligence agencies. The report also includes no discussion of materials that Georgia says prove its case, including intercepts of phone calls between Russian soldiers describing a backup of military vehicles in the key tunnel between Russia and South Ossetia on the night in question.

Instead, it relies heavily on a legal analysis that says Georgia's attack on Tskhinvali could not be considered self-defense because bombarding the capital would not have stopped the Ossetian assault on Georgian villages.

The report also said investigators could not determine whether Georgian troops deliberately attacked and killed Russian peacekeeping forces in Tskhinvali, or whether the Russians fired first and led the Georgians to return fire. But even if Russian peacekeepers were attacked, the report said, that would not have justified the large-scale invasion of Georgia that followed.

Russia rejected that finding but hailed the report as a vindication. "It provides an unequivocal answer to the main question of 'Who started the war?'" Vladimir Chizhov, Russia's ambassador to the European Union, told reporters in Brussels. "The report is mostly objective, and it makes the conclusion that the conflict began with Georgia's aggression."

Eduard Kokoity, the president of South Ossetia, issued a statement that condemned Saakashvili but said nothing to rebut the report's conclusion that Ossetian militias engaged in "systematic looting and destruction of ethnic Georgian villages." The report accused Russia of failing to stop and prevent the actions.

#20

Georgia Challenges Report That Says It Fired First Shot

By Ellen Barry

New York Times, October 1, 2009

MOSCOW -- Hours after the European Union released a report on the origins of the August 2008 war in South Ossetia, Georgia challenged one of the main findings, saying a Russian invasion was already under way when Georgia attacked South Ossetia, a separatist enclave.

In a statement on Wednesday night, the Georgian government said the European investigators had ignored evidence that Russian soldiers and volunteers were already in South Ossetia on Aug. 7 and that Georgia had therefore acted in self-defense. Salome Samadashvili, Georgia's envoy to the European Union, said the inquiry had confirmed "almost all the facts which we have been alleging," but erred by determining that Russia's military actions did not qualify as an invasion.

"We have never denied that we tried our best to protect our citizens," she said. "If the commission feels that they didn't deserve this protection, then that's a matter of opinion."

The report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, the most authoritative inquiry into the war's origins, finds fault with both sides, saying that Georgia set off the conflict by attacking South Ossetia, and that Russia's long-term policy provoked, and then exploited, the violence.

The report's author emphasized the "years of provocations, mutual accusations, military and political threats and acts of violence" that led to the war and urged readers to look beyond the issue of who shot first. But Russian officials seized on that finding, saying they had been vindicated in the eyes of the world.

"For the first time, the report directly names the causes of the conflict," said Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the committee on foreign affairs in the lower house of Parliament. He said events would have unfolded differently if Europe had embraced these conclusions a year ago.

Referring to Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, he continued, "But then, everyone agreed with the aggressor Saakashvili and criticized Russia."

In fact, the report finds serious wrongdoing on both sides. For Georgia, it centers on the shelling of Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, on the night of Aug. 7, an act that Mr. Saakashvili has portrayed as necessary to defend against a Russian invasion, to protect Georgian villages or to restore order to the region. The report found that mercenaries had crossed the Russian border, and that some regular troops were present, but not enough to constitute an invasion.

"None of the explanations given by the Georgian authorities in order to provide some sort of legal justification for the attack lend it a valid explanation," said the lead investigator, Heidi Tagliavini, a Swiss ambassador, in a statement on Wednesday.

The report says that Georgia violated international law when it used force against Russian peacekeeping troops stationed in Tskhinvali, and that from that moment, Russia's army had grounds to use force in the peacekeepers' defense.

The report also says Russia "went far beyond the reasonable limits of defense," undertaking a drive deep into Georgian territory that violated international law and was "not even remotely commensurate with the threat to Russian peacekeepers."

Investigators found that Russia had allowed "ethnic cleansing" in Georgian villages by South Ossetian irregulars, dismissed Russia's claim that Georgia had been carrying out genocide against Ossetians, and said that Russia broke the law by distributing passports in the enclaves and by recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign nations.

The inquiry is not associated with any judicial proceeding and aims only to establish the facts, Ms. Tagliavini said in a statement. "There is no chance for future peace without the facts being presented in a sober and neutral manner," she said.

For nearly 10 months, the mission has worked under enormous pressure, and some suspicion, from both governments.

In February, a high-ranking Georgian official accused a German expert who had submitted a research paper to Ms. Tagliavini of pro-Russian bias, saying that the German worked for organizations financed by the Russian energy giant Gazprom.

On Wednesday, the deputy speaker of Georgia's Parliament, Levan Vepkhvadze, said in remarks broadcast on Georgian television: "We don't doubt that Ms. Tagliavini is objective. But there was a German analyst in the commission, who in advance, before the work of the commission started, presented in public his assessments of the conflict which were definitely biased."

Russia expressed its own reservations, especially about the finding that its army used disproportionate force. A Foreign Ministry statement on Wednesday night said the report included "a number of diffuse and ambiguous formulations that, as we understand them, reflect the previous politicized approach of many of the European Union to the events of August 2008."

#21
Russia Revives Privatization Putin Signals Shift After Years of Increased Government Control
By Alexander Kolyandr and William Mauldin
Wall Street Journal, September 30, 2009

MOSCOW -- Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has presided over a doubling of the Kremlin's ownership of big business, on Tuesday signaled a return to more private ownership as the country faces its first budget deficit in a decade.

The verbal shift toward selling off shares, which follows years of increasing government control that began when Mr. Putin served as president, comes amid Russia's first recession since it defaulted on its debt in 1998.

Russia had privatized Soviet enterprises earlier in the 1990s, under Boris Yeltsin.

"Russia will remain a liberal market economy," Mr. Putin said at an investor conference here, adding that the government will press on with privatization and reduce the state's role in the economy.

But the plans for privatization may be too little, too late, according to Zina Psiola, portfolio manager at the Clariden Leu Russia Equity fund, who says Russia has "missed a chance" to become a powerful new economy compared with other commodity producers such as Brazil and Chile.

Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said Tuesday that in three years, the state may sell stakes in the oil, telecommunications and aviation industries, as well as possibly reducing its stake in OAO Bank VTB below 50%.

"When the crisis is over -- no sooner than three years from now -- we will gradually sell assets, including VTB," Mr. Kudrin said.

After meeting with international energy executives last week, Mr. Putin had lunch Tuesday with a small group of portfolio investors, a further sign of openness to outside funds in a country that has systematically limited foreign access to so-called strategic sectors.

Capital Research Global Investors, DWS Investments, the Kuwait Investment Authority, and Singapore's Temasek Holdings all participated in the meeting, according to people familiar with the matter.

One senior banker at the conference noted the "telling" contrast between the government's market-friendly rhetoric and the poor organization of the conference, which left many investors standing in the Moscow rain to clear heavy security and gain entry.

Government officials were short on specifics about privatization. Mr. Putin said the country would take it slowly on liberalization of the gas industry, dominated by OAO Gazprom, of which Russian President Dmitry Medvedev is a former chairman.

"I can't see the government giving up control of any of the large companies, although selling down to 50% plus one could be possible," said Ron Smith, chief strategist at Alfa Bank in Moscow.

Economy Minister Elvira Nabiullina named Sovkomflot, a state-owned maritime shipping company, and the country's ports and airports as targets for privatization. She said her ministry hasn't considered selling a stake in state-controlled oil major OAO Rosneft. First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, an ally of Mr. Putin, indicated on Sept. 21 that the state may sell part of its stake in the oil company.

The Russian government currently owns about 52% of the country's publicly traded equity, compared with 27% five years ago, according to Chris Weafer, chief strategist at UralSib Financial Corp. in Moscow.

#22

US must reach out to Russia on missile defense: Obama AFP, September 29, 2009

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama said Tuesday it was important to work with Russia on a new generation missile shield, following his abandonment of an earlier US system that Moscow opposed, in Eastern Europe.

His comments came hours after Russia asked for guarantees from Washington that the new plan, targeting Iranian short- and medium-range missiles, would not threaten its own security.

"It is important for us to reach out to Russia and explore ways in which the missile defense configurations that we envision could potentially lead to further collaboration," Obama said after talks with NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

"We want to improve generally not only US-Russian relations, but also NATO-Russian relations, while making absolutely clear that our commitments to all of our allies in NATO is sacrosanct," Obama said.

Earlier, Russia's NATO envoy Dmitry Rogozin said at a press conference in Moscow that the Kremlin wanted guarantees the new US system "only concerns short- and long-range missiles."

"If this system is of a mobile nature, where are the guarantees... that this system will not float up to us, to our northern seas or the Baltic?"

The new plan announced by Obama envisions a mobile system of sea-based interceptors that would protect against short- and medium-range missiles from Iran, instead of Tehran's as yet to be developed long-range arsenal.

Russia had strongly opposed an earlier US plan that would have seen missile defense facilities deployed in Eastern Europe.

The earlier plan was strongly backed by Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, and Russia welcomed the Obama administration's decision to scrap it.

#23

Russians see Putin, not Medvedev in control: poll Reuters, September 29, 2009

MOSCOW - Russians consider Prime Minister Vladimir Putin the country's key political figure, continuing to overshadow his successor as president, Dmitry Medvedev, according to an opinion poll released on Tuesday.

The survey was conducted this month after statements by Medvedev criticizing the country's widespread corruption and other failings, in what some analysts said was a bid to define his own vision and emerge from Putin's shadow.

According to the results, Russians do not believe Medvedev has managed to establish his own center of power, 18 months after his March 2008 election.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents said Putin and the circle around him are the main influence on Medvedev's policies, according to the poll by the independent Levada Center. Just 20 percent said Medvedev pursues an independent policy.

These figures have shown little change in recent months. Eight-one percent said Medvedev, handpicked by Putin, pursues the same political agenda as his predecessor, compared with 77 percent in March 2008.

The poll also followed comments by Putin this month in which he said he and Medvedev would decide which of them would run in the next presidential election in 2012, fuelling speculation he plans to return as head of state.

"Maybe of course there is some contest between the teams around these two people, but Medvedev stresses they are partners and he does not try to challenge Vladimir Putin," said Denis Volkov of the Levada Center.

"Putin was successful and maybe lucky to be president at a time when oil prices were high, helping to give him an image of stability. It is very hard in the current conditions for a dependent figure to become independent," he said.

The poll was conducted from September 18-21, with 1,600 people questioned in 128 locations in 46 regions of the country. Levada estimates it has a 3.4 percent margin of error.

#24

The Virtual President By Nikolai Petrov Moscow Times, September 29, 2009

Our leaders and political analysts have been very active in recent weeks. We had the Valdai Club, the global security forum in Yaroslavl, President Dmitry Medvedev's "Go, Russia!" article and provocative statements made by the president's first deputy chief of staff, Vladislav Surkov, and the head of the Institute of Contemporary Development, Igor Yurgens.

This deluge of polemical sound bites has underscored the fact that Medvedev has not offered concrete solutions for the most difficult challenges facing Russia today. Instead, he only offers vague slogans while proposing overly ambitious projects in areas that would ordinarily fall under the authority of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The country's numerous political analysts compete with one another to come up with accurate interpretations of what this or that statement by the president and prime minister means for Russian and world politics. A perfect example is the Valdai Club, designed to give our top leaders the opportunity to make seemingly meaningful - but in reality very empty - statements for consumption by the international community.

I don't want to become just one more observer giving his opinion of Medvedev's curious statement that the system of appointing governors is democratic, that it is appropriate for Russia and that it will remain in place for the next 100 years. Instead, I will risk making a diagnosis of the country's political system.

I think these signs indicate that the Kremlin is both nervous and uncertain. The Kremlin realizes that it must finally do something to correct the situation but is unable and unwilling to do so. This realization is a break from its former state of self-complacency.

Two factors are compounding the problem - the desire of the authorities to preserve their high popularity ratings at any cost, and the paralysis of government officials who cannot take action without approval from the top.

When Putin moved from the Kremlin to the White House, he took all of the authority with him. The result is that while something is being accomplished in the economic sphere, the political work of the Kremlin has ground to a halt.

Medvedev has said the country is so burdened by bureaucracy that nobody lifts a finger until he gives the order to act. But at the same time, he draws the surprising conclusion that the political system is functioning well.

The hyperactivity on the analyst front is nothing but a meaningless jumble of empty political signals, proposals and conjecture issuing from the ever-shifting political landscape. It represents a crippled system in which idle boyars and economically crippled, servile oligarchs kowtow to their powerless and passive king.

This is Russia's latest risky experiment: the attempt to carry out Medvedev's transition from a relatively unknown political figure to the country's chief executive. Were it not for the crisis, the experiment might even be amusing. Under the current circumstances, however, it is a disaster waiting to happen.

Nikolai Petrov is a scholar in residence at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

#25

**Report: Russia urges restraint on Iran
Reuters, September 28, 2009**

MOSCOW - Russia is urging restraint from the international community after a series of Iranian missile launches, a Foreign Ministry source told Interfax news agency on Monday.

The missile drills of the elite Revolutionary Guards coincide with escalating tension in Iran's nuclear dispute with the West, after last week's disclosure by Tehran that it is building a second uranium enrichment plant.

"We should not give way to emotions now," the Russian foreign ministry source said. "We should try to calm down and the main thing is to launch a productive negotiations process (with Iran)."

European Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana said on Monday he was concerned after Iran test-fired a missile which defence analysts have said could hit Israel and U.S. bases in the Gulf.

Russia has not officially reacted so far to the Iranian missile launches. The foreign ministry regularly distributes unattributed information through domestic news agencies.

Iran tested missiles just days after reporting to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) it was constructing a second uranium enrichment plant -- a move that fuelled international condemnation and fresh doubts about the nature of Tehran's nuclear programme.

The ministry source said the international community should wait to see what Iranian officials say at a meeting in Geneva on Thursday with representatives of six major powers, including the United States, China and Russia before taking action.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said on Friday that if Iran does not cooperate at the meeting, then "other mechanisms" should be used to deal with Tehran's nuclear programme.

Medvedev did not explicitly say whether Russia would support Western calls for sanctions against Iran.

"We await the results of the Geneva meeting... and we are counting on the Iranians not to come empty-handed," the source said.

The source said there was a need to investigate the nature of the new enrichment plant south of Iran.

"It is necessary to check and undertake an impartial analysis" of the facility, the source said. "Only after this can any steps be taken.

"Common sense, not emotion should prevail now," the source said.

#26

Warmer U.S.-Russia Relations May Yield Little in Action Toward Iran

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, September 28, 2009

MOSCOW -- The Kremlin has long responded to proposals for tougher sanctions against Iran with arms folded and a scowl. Last week, that attitude began softening, bringing the Obama administration closer to a diplomatic coup in its efforts to contain the Iranian nuclear program.

But the relatively conciliatory statements by Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, present an opening to the administration that could turn out to yield little. Russia, a neighbor of Iran, is far more intertwined with it geopolitically than any other world power, and has more concerns about upsetting relations.

Russia is also reluctant to mass the might of the United Nations Security Council against a single country, especially at Washington's behest. That in part explains why Russia has historically sought to dilute sanctions, as it did in previous rounds against Iran.

Moreover, the Kremlin might go slowly because it senses that in a world where it has less influence than it did during Soviet times, it can use its veto power in the Security Council to ensure attention and respect. If Russia were to accede right away to calls for a crackdown, it would risk becoming just another country lining up behind the United States. The Kremlin's pride would almost certainly not allow that.

Already, Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, appears to be positioning Russia to back away from the supportive stance suggested by Mr. Medvedev's comments.

Asked about the announcement on Friday by the United States, Britain and France that Iran had failed to disclose a secret uranium enrichment plant, Mr. Lavrov said it was not evident that Iran had done anything wrong. He said it was premature to assert that new sanctions were necessary.

“As I understand it, there is no clarity regarding the legal issues,” Mr. Lavrov said.

He also chided the Western powers for not telling Russia earlier that their intelligence agencies had discovered the Iranian enrichment plant.

Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin, Russia’s paramount leader, who tends to be more hawkish than Mr. Medvedev toward the United States, in recent days has not echoed Mr. Medvedev’s views on sanctions.

Still, Moscow’s overall outlook toward the United States has unquestionably warmed in recent months, largely because of President Obama’s drive to “reset” relations, and that could ultimately be pivotal.

Mr. Obama’s decision this month to cancel an antimissile system in Eastern Europe proposed by the Bush administration has achieved a particularly galvanizing effect. The Kremlin had deemed the antimissile system a direct threat to Russia, though the United States had said it was intended to protect against attacks from countries like Iran.

Mr. Medvedev regularly expressed his appreciation for Mr. Obama last week, drawing a contrast with the tensions between Moscow and Washington in the later Bush years. Obama administration officials cited Mr. Medvedev’s remarks as proof that their attempt to engage Moscow was paying off, and could lead to action against Iran.

“We do have various doubts about what Iran is doing,” Mr. Medvedev said last week. “If all possibilities for influencing the situation have been exhausted, we could consider international sanctions.”

“Sometimes, there is no other option,” he added.

Russia has said that it does not want Iran to obtain nuclear weapons, but it has also articulated misgivings about Western assertions of Iranian nuclear advances. While Russia is not one of Iran’s largest trading partners, it does sell military hardware to Iran and is building a civilian nuclear power plant there.

What is clear is that Russia considers sanctions as not solely an Iranian issue, but one of several that revolve around its dealings with Washington. It is negotiating a treaty to reduce the size of strategic nuclear forces, and remains alarmed by the possible expansion of NATO into former Soviet republics like Ukraine and Georgia.

If those issues are handled to the Kremlin’s liking, then it will be more apt to agree to stiff sanctions.

“For Russia, Iran is a very good bargaining chip,” said Vladimir Sotnikov, a senior research associate at the Center for International Security in Moscow. “And that is why, for now, I don’t think that Russia is going to be ready to wholly support major new sanctions.”

The dynamic is complicated by China, another sanctions opponent with a Security Council veto. The Kremlin can publicly show more leeway toward sanctions - in essence, offering gratitude to Mr. Obama for canceling the antimissile system in Eastern Europe - while knowing that China may continue standing in their way.

China trades heavily with Iran, and its skeptical comments on Friday after the announcement about the new enrichment plant indicated how reluctant it may be on sanctions.

At the same time, though, if China senses that Russia is more amenable, the Chinese may feel that they have to shift because they do not want to be isolated.

And Mr. Medvedev’s criticism of Iran last week has put more pressure on its leadership before nuclear talks on Thursday in Geneva between Iran and the United States and five other powers, including Russia.

Even so, in interviews over the weekend, experts in Moscow were somewhat unconvinced that the Kremlin would back forceful steps against Iran, though they did not rule it out.

Vladimir Sazhin, a commentator at the state-run Voice of Russia radio and one of the nation's leading Iran analysts, said it was important to understand that Russia considered Iran to be a vital ally on regional issues. After the disputed Iranian presidential election in June, in fact, Mr. Medvedev congratulated President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Both countries are on the Caspian Sea and have territory in the Caucasus Mountains. (The Soviet Union had a border with Iran, but Russia is now about 100 miles away, separated from Iran by another former Soviet republic, Azerbaijan.) Both Russia and Iran want to prevent NATO from setting up bases in the region.

Mr. Sazhin said Russia had been pleased that Iran had not questioned Russia's actions in Chechnya, a Muslim region in the Caucasus where the federal authorities have fought two brutal civil wars to put down a separatist Muslim insurgency.

"The Kremlin's politics come down to the fact that they do not want to inflame relations with Iran, because of Russia's regional interests," Mr. Sazhin said.

Mr. Sazhin said he would not be surprised if Mr. Medvedev continued to imply that he was open-minded toward sanctions, in large part because the Russian leadership realizes that China may not relent and Iran will find a way to prolong the dispute.

"The Kremlin can play a good game because it knows that nothing will probably come of it," he said.

#27

A Policy Agenda for the U.S.-Russia Congressional Caucus [Web Memo]

By Ariel Cohen

Heritage Foundation, October 1, 2009

Last week, Congress launched the bipartisan Congressional Russia Caucus, which is chaired by Congressmen Tom Price (R-GA) and Dennis J. Kucinich (D-OH). The creation of the caucus could not be timelier, as the Obama Administration seems to have made unrequited concessions to Russia in missile defense, strategic arms talks, and the sale of Russian arms to Iran and Venezuela. Meanwhile, the U.S. said little regarding its violation of Ukrainian and Georgian sovereignty.

This paper provides a policy agenda for the U.S.-Russia Congressional Caucus that will best serve the U.S.'s vital national interests while cultivating this important relationship.

Arms Control and Missile Defense: Unilateral Concessions?

Congress should cast a critical eye on the executive branch's Russian agenda. Since January, the Administration has prioritized Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) follow-on negotiations, which it is rushing to complete before the treaty expires in December. This deadline, as well as the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by Congress, may be a key stepping stone to achieving President Obama's unrealistic goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

In its quest to push forward the post-START treaty and secure Moscow's help on Iran, the Administration dropped plans for missile defense in Eastern Europe, despite the U.S. Air Force's assessment that Iran could have an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the U.S. by 2015.

Both President Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin pocketed the concessions, smiled, and demanded new ones. While making the U.S. look weak, America's decision also upset the Czechs and the Poles, who worry that this concession will tacitly acknowledge Russia's authority in what its president called the "sphere of privileged interests."

Russia is currently in violation of existing arms control and non-proliferation promises. According to the Strategic Posture Commission, a congressional panel, Russia is "no longer in compliance with Presidential Nuclear Initiatives

commitments." Specifically, it violated the current START treaty by testing its SS-27 ICBM with multiple warheads. Additionally, Russia may be violating non-proliferation obligations vis-à-vis Iran.

Recently, the highly suspicious disappearance of the Arctic Sea freighter only increased concerns that Russia is failing to meet its non-proliferation promises. Sources in Moscow and leaks from Israeli press intimated that the ship was loaded with S-300 air defense missiles for Iran. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "secretly" visited Russia, apparently to discuss these illicit arms supplies and Iran.

The Iran-Venezuela Gambit

Whether President Obama's gambit to secure Moscow's help on Iran will succeed is highly uncertain. While the Iranian agenda is clearly separate from that of Russia, the Kremlin views Iran as a geopolitical wedge against the U.S. and its allies in the Gulf region and the Middle East.

Russia's commercial interests in Iran span from billions in arms sales and transfer of nuclear and space technology to lucrative oil and gas contracts for state-controlled Russian companies. Therefore, Russian support for Iran's nuclear program and arms sales are not only lucrative but reflect a geopolitical agenda that is at least 20 years old. While Medvedev did not completely rule out sanctions, Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov all but rejected the imposition of stronger sanctions on Iran.

Meanwhile, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez recently announced that his nation will purchase dozens of Russian tanks, helicopters, and other arms for over \$2 billion, signaling growing military and strategic ties between the two countries. This anti-American and anti-democratic alliance bodes ill for both the U.S. and the Western Hemisphere.

Mounting Pressure on Georgia and Ukraine

In addition to these issues, there are broader geopolitical concerns with Obama's foreign policy toward Russia and Eurasia. In late July, Vice President Joe Biden visited Ukraine and Georgia. The mere fact that he ventured there two weeks after President Obama's visit to Moscow indicates that the White House has downgraded its relationship with these two countries.

Biden correctly rejected Russia's claims to a 19th-century-style sphere of influence, but he fell short in addressing national security concerns for both states. This is an ominous development. In the run up to Ukrainian presidential elections in January 2010, the Kremlin has been ratcheting up the pressure on Kyiv. Moscow is building up military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and encouraging separatism in Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine. Russian interference may seriously destabilize Eastern Ukraine and attempt to detach the Crimea.

Pipeline Politics

Despite the fall in energy demand across Europe, Russia is racing to secure its natural gas market share and bypass Ukraine, the principal transit country. It is building Nord Stream and South Stream pipeline systems. Europe may diminish its dependence on Russian gas by boosting an alternative pipeline, Nabucco, but in order to do so, it requires U.S. political support for Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan to cooperate on this mega-project.

Revision of European Security Architecture?

The recent "trial balloons" floated by Obama's geopolitical guru, Zbigniew Brzezinski, are disconcerting. In the Fall 2009 issue of Foreign Affairs, Brzezinski called for a treaty between NATO and the Moscow-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization as well as a joint NATO-Shanghai Cooperation Organization Council.

These steps would be tantamount to of the recognition of Russian hegemony. The Administration has already signaled that it will listen to Russian ideas about reshaping European security architecture. Such proposals should give Congress pause as Russia is obstructing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and is seeking to drive a wedge between NATO members.

Trade and Economics

Yet U.S.-Russian relations are not hopeless. Economic ties between the two nations will expand if Russia promotes the rule of law and fights corruption. The Administration is likely to ask Congress to consider abrogating the long-promised Jackson-Vanick Amendment, which demanded free emigration of Soviet Jews, something accomplished long ago.

The lifting of Jackson-Vanick is necessary for Russia to receive Permanent Normal Trade Relations status. U.S.-Russian relations will improve if Russian society becomes more open, transparent, and democratic.

What the Caucus Should Do

The caucus should not allow the Obama Administration to forgo core American foreign policy values and objectives with regard to Russia. Specifically, the U.S.-Russia Caucus should:

- Call to postpone the START follow-on treaty signature until the Department of Defense's Nuclear Posture Review is finished in December 2009 so that the U.S. nuclear requirements are clarified. The caucus should also refuse to fund reductions in the U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces under the START follow-on treaty with Russia in fiscal year (FY) 2010 unless the President certifies to Congress that the treaty provides for sufficient mechanisms to verify compliance and does not place limitations on the U.S. ballistic missile defense systems, space capabilities, or advanced conventional weapons (Prompt Global Strike) and that adequate funds are requested for FY 2011 for nuclear modernization and increased reliability, safety, and security of the U.S. nuclear force. Congress should hold hearings that examine potential U.S. concessions to Russia in any START follow-on treaty, Russian non-compliance with existing arms-control commitments, and other important compliance issues with regard to existing commitments before the Administration signs a new treaty.

Express support for missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic both to protect against the Iranian threat and to bolster the relationship with U.S. NATO allies.

- Support targeted sanctions against Russian companies that sell destabilizing weapons to Iran and Venezuela. Congress should demand Moscow's cooperation on robust sanctions against Iran--including curbing gasoline imports and the cessation of all military supplies and technologies--unless Tehran agrees to accept full International Atomic Energy Agency supervision of its nuclear program. Senior Administration officials and experts should be invited to testify on this subject.

- Uphold the rights of post-Soviet states to sovereignty and territorial integrity. This includes Georgia's future reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as autonomous republics and Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, including the Crimea. Congress should initiate hearing on these important issues and issue a Sense of Congress resolution on Russian violation of Georgian and Ukrainian sovereignty.

- Encourage the Obama Administration to work with European governments and companies to implement Nabucco, the gas pipeline connecting the Caspian reserves to Europe.

- Call on the Administration to expeditiously appoint a U.S. Ambassador to OSCE. An ambassador will help resist Russia's plans for watering down OSCE's commitment to free and fair elections and undercutting election observation procedures, including undermining the Office of Democracy and Human Rights in Warsaw. The U.S. should bolster the 2010 OSCE chairman, Kazakhstan, in its efforts to resist Russian pressure to undermine OSCE's commitment to democratic reform.

Promote democracy, good governance, transparency, and the rule of law. In dealing with Russian counterparts, Congress should emphasize strengthening the rule of law and improvement of property rights and conduct hearings on these subjects.

A Democracy Deficit

Members of Congress should remember that their Russian counterparts suffer from a democracy deficit. Yet U.S.-Russian relations are too important to be left exclusively to President Obama and the arms-control enthusiasts. The

Congressional U.S.-Russia Caucus should guard American interests while promoting an agenda that encourages security, freedom, democracy, and economic cooperation with Russia.

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#28

Europe Exposes Russia's Guilt in Georgia In an invasion, when can a spade be called a spade?

By Svante E Cornell

Wall Street Journal, October 1, 2009

This week's much-anticipated European Union-commissioned report into the causes of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 predictably spread the blame for the conflict around. While Georgia was also censured, the text is devastating to Russia's narrative of the conflict.

Assisted by a small army of experts, Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini has spent close to a year investigating the origins of the war that initially shocked Europe but then was relatively quickly forgotten in the midst of the global economic crisis that succeeded it. As expected, both sides have claimed that the 40-page report-with a thousand pages of appendices-vindicates their version of events. Yet anyone who bothers to read the document will find that the Tagliavini Commission apportions the overwhelming part of the responsibility for the conflict on Moscow. In fact, it rejects practically every item in Russia's version of what supposedly happened last year.

The press has so far focused on the commission's conclusion that Georgia started the war. That should, however, not be confused with the question of responsibility: Firing the first shot does not necessarily mean being the aggressor. The report acknowledges this, concluding that, "there is no way to assign overall responsibility for the conflict to one side alone." The report details the extended series of Russian provocations, accelerating in the spring of 2008, that precipitated the war.

The report faults Georgia for lacking a legal basis for its attack on the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali, and for the use of indiscriminate force there. But on the crucial Georgian claim that it was responding to a Russian invasion, the report equivocates: The mission is "not in a position" to consider the Georgian claims "sufficiently substantiated." This is an exercise in semantics, since the next sentences acknowledge that Russia provided military training and equipment to the rebels, and that "volunteers and mercenaries" entered Georgian territory from Russia before the Georgian attack. One is left wondering what would be necessary for a spade to be called a spade.

But the report is far more devastating in its dismissal of Russia's justification for its invasion-in fact surprisingly so for an EU product. As will be recalled, Russia variously claimed it was protecting its citizens; engaging in a humanitarian intervention; responding to a Georgian "genocide" of Ossetians; or responding to an attack on its peacekeepers. The EU report finds that because Russia's distribution of passports to Abkhazians and Ossetians in the years prior to the war was illegal, its rationale of rescuing its "citizens" is invalid as they were not legally Russian. It also concludes that Moscow's claim of humanitarian intervention cannot be recognized "at all," in particular given the Kremlin's past opposition to the entire concept of humanitarian intervention.

The list goes on. The report finds Russian allegations of genocide founded in neither law nor evidence. In other words, they're not true. And whereas the report does acknowledge a Russian right to protect its peacekeepers, it finds that Moscow's response "cannot be regarded as even remotely commensurate with the threat to Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia." On the other hand, it faults Russia for failing to intervene against the ethnic cleansing of Georgians from South Ossetia and Abkhazia that took place during and after the war. Finally, it castigates Russia's recognition of the independence of the two breakaway territories as illegal, and as a dangerous erosion of the principles of international law.

In sum, the official EU inquiry found that none of Russia's various justifications for its invasion of Georgia hold water, and also faults Russia's behavior following the conflict, as Moscow continues to be in material breach of the

EU-negotiated cease-fire agreement. While the report will be of great use to historians, its main implications should concern the present, because just as the war did not begin in August 2008, the conflict between Russia and Georgia is not over. While the war's military phase only lasted a few weeks, it continues in the diplomatic, political, and economic realms. Russia successfully evicted the international community from the conflict zones and expanded its military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, building large bases there. Its economic warfare against Georgia continues, as does its efforts at subversion inside the country. Most importantly, Russia's stated objective of regime change and the effective termination of Georgia's sovereignty goes on.

This conflict continues to destabilize a part of Europe to which the West has so far not paid sufficient attention. The EU, now engaged also on the ground in Georgia, must go beyond reluctantly accepting, as it has, that this conflict is a European problem. It needs to overcome its internal divisions and pursue a cohesive strategy toward Georgia—one that takes its basis in the country's European identity and aspirations, as well as its right to sovereignty and security. As for the White House, it would ignore at its own peril one of the EU report's final conclusions: "Notions such as privileged spheres of interest...are irreconcilable with international law. They are dangerous to international peace and stability. They should be rejected."

And doing so will take more than words and the scrapping of missile shields—it will take the type of serious engagement that neither the EU nor the U.S. have so far been willing to pursue.

Mr. Svante E. Cornell is research director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University-Saï and director of the Institute for Security and Development Policy, and co-editor of "The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia" (M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

#29

It's time for a Jewish boycott of the Ukraine

By Anshel Pfeffer

Haaretz, October 2, 2009

According to the Associated Press, Serhiy Ratushnyak, mayor of the Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod, is being charged with hooliganism, abuse of office and xenophobia for, among other things, calling a presidential candidate "an impudent little Jew."

Ratushnyak is unrepentant, telling the reporter, "Is everybody obliged to love Jews and Israel? If I don't like Jews and Israel, does that make me an anti-Semite?" Yes, well that's an interesting question. But I am not telling this story in order to ponder what defines anti-Semitism. It was actually the last bit of the AP report that especially appealed to me. Apparently, in the wake of the mayor's rant, Jewish leaders were quick to respond. First into the fray was Rabbi Berel Lazar, chief rabbi of Russia, who announced that he would be visiting Uzhhorod to support the local Jewish community. Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, chief rabbi of Ukraine, also condemned Ratushnyak but in the same breath, he also turned down his rabbinical colleague's offer of support. "Plenty of anti-Semites in Russia can use the help of Berel Lazar before he worries about anti-Semitism in Ukraine," he said.

For anyone even slightly acquainted with Jewish politics in the former Soviet Union, there is nothing surprising here. Lazar is one of two men claiming to be the chief rabbi of Russia, and for the last few years has enjoyed the Kremlin's support for his claim. Part of the unofficial deal that comes with this backing is that he has to support Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's foreign and domestic policies; in this case, that means doing everything to besmirch the image of Ukraine, Russia's former vassal, which is now eager to join NATO and the European Union. One method of doing this, which the Kremlin and its agents have repeatedly employed in the past, is to portray Ukraine as a country where anti-Semitism flourishes while its government turns a blind eye; hence Lazar's offer of support and intended visit.

Bleich's irritation is quite understandable. As he says, if Lazar is really so intent on fighting anti-Semitism, he has his job cut out for him in the country whose Jews he purports to represent. On the other hand, Bleich must also keep the government in Kiev happy. While he's been widely regarded as chief rabbi in Ukraine since 1992, two other rabbis in Kiev also claim this title. (Both of Bleich's challengers belong to the Lubavitch movement, another source

of the Bleich-Lazar tension, as Lazar is also a Lubavitch rabbi who usurped a chief rabbi who had been serving in Moscow long before he arrived on the scene.)

All of these rabbinical politics could be great fun if, while trying to hold on to their jobs, they weren't dragging their communities in with them. The Jews of Russia and Ukraine face exactly the same challenges in trying to build viable communities after the great majority of Jews have left these countries. Both communities also face what is certainly the worst anti-Semitism anywhere in Europe today. But almost any joint communal policy is impossible due to the deep rivalry between Moscow and Kiev. For Putin and Ukraine President Viktor Yushchenko, the local Jewish leaderships are useful political footballs in an increasingly cynical game. Lazar, Bleich and their supporters will say with a degree of justification that they have to walk a very fine line while looking out for the security of their community members, but there is still a distinct impression that all these rabbinical contenders are also looking out for their personal interests.

Whatever their motives, it is probably unrealistic to expect that Jewish leaders in countries like Russia and Ukraine would criticize their own governments. And let's be honest, many grandees of Jewish communities in nations with much longer democratic traditions are just as pusillanimous. Nor can the Israeli government or Jewish organizations that usually object to any occurrence of anti-Semitism real or imagined, around the globe do anything about the endemic hatred of Jews that exists in Russia. The Kremlin is a crucial player in the Iranian nuclear saga, and the Russians take every kind of criticism very personally (in the same way Turkey is let off the hook for the Armenian genocide because of its strategic importance). In other words, if we want some kind of cooperation on missiles and centrifuges, we can't kick up a fuss about skinheads vandalizing graveyards and roughing up rabbis.

If Russia is immune, due to its geopolitical power, it seems hardly fair to go after Ukraine. Yet we should. In no other country in Europe does the president honor "patriots" who were responsible for massacring thousands of Jews; the largest university in no other country has a department dedicated to churning out anti-Semitic literature; where else is there a cemetery in which an infamous blood libel is commemorated every year; which other capital city has authorized building a new hotel on the grounds of one of the Holocaust's most notorious killing fields.

It is high time for a Jewish boycott of Ukraine. Perhaps not a total boycott, at least not at first, but at the very least some symbolic gestures. To start, in order to protest the Kiev municipality's plan to build a hotel on Babi Yar (in preparation for the Euro 2012 football championship), the Israeli Football Association should announce today that it is going to boycott the games. (The fact that the chances of Israel's football team reaching the championship are nil is immaterial.) The second step should be ending all pilgrimages to the alleged tomb of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav in Uman. The hundred thousand visitors every year to Uman bring tens of millions of dollars into the coffers of the Ukrainian government, corrupt local politicians and the mafia. The Bratslav Hassidim may be attached to their Rabbis grave, but we must explain to them that this is a matter of Jewish pride.