

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 13, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief

Dear Friend,

NCSJ will host its Annual Board of Governors meeting on Tuesday, December 8, from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. in our Washington offices. Please visit <http://ncsj.org/Board.shtml> to RSVP. I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. November 13, 2009

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#1

Medvedev Says Russia May Back Sanctions on Iran if Deal Falls Apart

By Ellen Barry

New York Times, November 8, 2009

MOSCOW — President Dmitri A. Medvedev said Russia might back sanctions against Iran if the Iranians did not take a “constructive position” on an international plan to temporarily diminish their stockpile of enriched uranium.

The statement, made in an interview with Der Spiegel and released by the Kremlin, resembles one Mr. Medvedev made in September after meeting with President Obama in New York. But it takes on added significance now because Iran has equivocated on the international agreement. That deal would require Iran to ship its low-enriched uranium out of the country for processing, easing fears that the fuel would be used for nuclear bombs.

“If agreements are reached on the programs linked to uranium enrichment and its use for peaceful purposes in Iran, we will with pleasure take part in these programs,” Mr. Medvedev said. “If the Iranian leadership takes a less constructive position, then anything is possible, in theory.”

“We would not want this to end in imposing sanctions under international law, because sanctions, as a rule, are a complex and dangerous path,” he continued. “But if there is no forward movement, no one can rule out this scenario.”

Russia has traditionally opposed sanctions against Iran, which it considers an important regional ally. In September, Mr. Medvedev signaled a policy shift after meeting with Mr. Obama, but Moscow remained reluctant; as recently as last month, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov called sanctions “counterproductive.” Still, Moscow may be left with no choice if Iran rejects the uranium enrichment plan, which Russia helped draft under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

During meetings with his British counterpart last week, Mr. Lavrov said he expected the plan “to be approved by all sides without exception, including Iran.”

“In a sense, I think this is a red line,” said Vladimir Sotnikov, an Iran analyst at the Center for International Security in Moscow. “What I think is that probably Russia will try again to postpone this red line as much as possible. But Iran is not giving Russia a choice.”

News of the accord — supported by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — led to a political uproar in Iran, where his critics said the country was giving up too much to the West. Tehran then began backing away from the deal, saying it would not abide by the original terms but that it had alternative proposals.

On Saturday, a senior Iranian lawmaker kept up the pressure on the government to reject the deal. The lawmaker, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, told the semiofficial news agency ISNA that the deal was “called off,” although he also said that Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran’s ambassador to the I.A.E.A., was “in talks” to try to find alternatives to the deal.

Mr. Boroujerdi rejected the notion that there was a deadline for responding to the deal.

Under the original plan, the country would have been required to send about three-quarters of its current known stockpile of low-enriched uranium to Russia for conversion into a form it could use only in a peaceful nuclear reactor. If Iran’s stated estimate of its stockpile of fuel is accurate, the deal would leave the country with too little fuel to make a weapon until the stockpile was replenished.

American officials said they thought that the accord would give them a year or so to seek a broader nuclear agreement with Iran while defusing the possibility that Israel might try to attack Iran’s nuclear installations.

Mr. Medvedev’s latest comments on sanctions came in a wide-ranging interview with Der Spiegel, just ahead of a visit to Germany for the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Among the topics he discussed was the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty; he said that Washington and Moscow “have every chance” to complete a renegotiation “and sign a legally binding document by the end of this year.”

Mr. Medvedev also suggested — as he does regularly — that his views on Soviet history differed from those of his predecessor, Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin, who is widely considered the de facto leader of the country. Asked if he agreed with Mr. Putin’s oft-quoted statement that the collapse of the Soviet Union was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century,” Mr. Medvedev called the collapse “a very serious, dramatic event” that divided the Soviet people.

But his answer seemed to be no. “I think the Second World War is no less serious a catastrophe in the 20th century, and if you consider its consequences, a much more serious tragedy,” he said. “And the revolution of 1917 in our country was accompanied by a civil war, in which relatives fought against each other, and friends shot each other. Wasn’t that a catastrophe?”

#2

For Russia’s Communists, Ousting Putin Is a Priority

By Yulia Taranova

New York Times, November 8, 2009

MOSCOW — Along with the perennial calls for “land for farmers” and “factories for workers,” Communists who marched in Moscow on the Saturday anniversary of the 1917 revolution offered a slogan of more recent vintage: “Russia without Putin.”

As the Nov. 7 holiday approached, leaders of Russia's Communist Party — with 13 percent of the electorate the country's largest opposition faction — have made it clear that they prefer President Dmitri A. Medvedev to his predecessor, and the current prime minister, Vladimir V. Putin.

Speaking at the party's annual plenum last week, the party's president, Gennady A. Zyuganov, said the so-called tandem government of Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev was collapsing.

He said opposition politicians "are eager to support the president if he ever decides to go on a real but not declarative struggle for those principles that he stands for."

Mr. Putin remains Russia's most popular politician, with Mr. Medvedev trailing him by around 10 points in most polls. Approval ratings for both leaders dipped last month amid widespread allegations of fraud in local elections; on Oct. 25, the Public Opinion Foundation reported that Mr. Putin's trust rating fell to 66 percent from 72 percent, the lowest point since he became prime minister, though he regained four points of that loss last week.

Sergei A. Markov, a State Duma deputy with the governing United Russia Party, said opposition forces had long sought to drive a wedge between the leaders "in order to weaken the system and create more room for themselves."

"In this tactic there is a seed of reason," he said. "This is the common position of the opposition. I personally think Zyuganov is under the influence of the more radical wing, which calls itself liberal."

Frustration with Mr. Putin's government was a common refrain at Saturday's Communist marches, which drew some 150,000 across Russia, according to the Interfax news service. Demonstrators' posters aired grievances about mortgage fraud, unemployment and police corruption; most of those interviewed had little to say about Mr. Medvedev.

"We consider Medvedev and Putin to be parts of one whole," said Yevgeny I. Kopyshchev, 48, who joined the march in Moscow. "However, we prefer to cultivate our leaders rather than confronting them. That is why, when Medvedev declared priorities that were so close to ours, we could not fail to appreciate it."

#3

An Oasis Is No Match for Bulldozers and Bureaucrats

By Michael Schwartz

New York Times, November 9, 2009

MOSCOW — In the 1950s, the Soviet government set aside a bit of land on the Moscow River for Maria I. Gurlynina's family and several dozen others to grow food. It was a barren plot, "nothing but sand and swamp," Ms. Gurlynina said. But it was theirs.

Her family carted in soil and planted apple trees and berry bushes. Her grandfather, a decorated World War II submariner, died hauling in a heavy load. But several birch trees that he planted decades ago still stand in front of the family's gingerbread-style cottage, built in recent years.

"They gave us this land and told us to develop it," Ms. Gurlynina, now 78, said. "They said we could stay here forever."

Then, early one morning last year, the bulldozers arrived.

The municipal government had declared that the Soviet-era permits giving Ms. Gurlynina and her neighbors use of the land were invalid, and it had ruled that the 200 or so homes in Ms. Gurlynina's community, called Rechnik, as well as dozens of others in a neighboring community, had to be removed. Moreover, the city said, the residents would have to pay for the demolition themselves.

It is a predicament not uncommon in Russia. The Soviet government's land monopoly may have ended some two decades ago, but the ability of the authorities to give and take away territory has not, real estate experts here say.

While private land ownership is not forbidden today as it was in the Soviet era, current real estate laws are vague: residents can buy homes and apartments, for instance, but not the land they stand on. In all cases people are left open to the caprice of corrupt officials and businessmen.

In Moscow, where space is limited and valuable, the problem is most acute.

“In different corners of Moscow, people are trying to defend their courtyards,” said Yelena S. Shomina, a housing expert at Moscow’s Higher School of Economics. City officials, she said, “calculate not the losses to the family, but the losses to the construction company, which are losses to the city government.”

Government critics have accused the Moscow authorities of using ambiguous land laws and the ignorance of residents to snap up lucrative plots and resell them to private interests.

Yelena Baturina, the wife of Moscow’s powerful mayor, Yuri M. Luzhkov, is a billionaire who is one of the city’s most successful real estate developers and Russia’s richest woman. Her company, Inteko, has benefited from several major Moscow government contracts.

On the day the bulldozers came to Ms. Gurlynnina’s neighborhood, dozens of homes were demolished. Their owners were denied compensation and had to seek new housing on their own. Ms. Gurlynnina’s house still stands, but the government has vowed to tear it down along with others before winter.

Officially, the government plans to turn the area into a nature preserve, though for many residents, the golf course and newly built gated neighborhood called Fantasy Island up the road suggest other intentions.

Rechnik was originally founded as a gardening collective in 1956 for employees of the Moscow Canal, a water transportation route, which was dug mostly by prisoners and connects the Moscow and the Volga Rivers.

The workers were given a strip of land along the Moscow River to “plant fruit trees and berries,” according to a copy of the original agreement. Though under Soviet law they could never own the land, the agreement granted the workers its “perpetual use.”

In the years since, the region has become an oasis in this sprawling city. On a recent visit, the leaves were a rich gold, and a silver frost gilded the last of Ms. Gurlynnina’s roses. The birches have grown tall and thick in the last half-century, and gardens bring bountiful crops of apples, plums, berries and other produce, residents said.

In the legal vacuum that followed the Soviet Union’s collapse, many of the original canal workers began passing their plots to their children or selling them, believing their lengthy stewardship of the land gave them the right to do so. The new owners have built sturdier and more luxurious homes, despite having no titles for the land.

As Rechnik has grown, so has the city around it. Today, the view from the river is obscured by gaudy high-rises that have been the hallmark of a Russian construction boom only recently curtailed by the economic crisis. As space has shrunk in Moscow, this sparsely populated property just inside the city’s last ring road has grown more attractive.

City officials did not respond to numerous phone messages seeking comment on their plans for Rechnik.

But the Moscow government has said that the Soviet-era agreement on Rechnik does not envisage permanent housing or allow workers to pass on or sell their plots to others. Officials have also questioned the legitimacy of the original Soviet-era decision to hand over the land and have declared the region a protected ecological zone.

“These are not residents here; they are temporary occupants,” Mr. Luzhkov, the mayor, said during a visit to Rechnik in 2007 covered by Russian television. “This village, like any other illegal construction in the city, does not have a right to exist.”

Because laws on land ownership remain incomplete and cumbersome, it is not clear who in this case and many similar ones throughout Russia is legally in the right, said Dmitri I. Katayev, a former Moscow City Council member who helped draft the first property laws after the Soviet collapse in 1991.

Though there are bureaucratic mechanisms in place for Russians to assume ownership of former communal apartments and private homes, he said, “The government just forgot about the issue of land.”

Residents of Rechnik say the government has ignored their requests to register their homes even without the land they sit on.

Whatever the law, the government has the upper hand. Shortly after Mr. Luzhkov's visit two years ago, the city cut off water and power to Rechnik. Today, the residents who still live there full time rely on generators.

Still, other than a few half-hearted protests, many residents — many of them elderly — have put up little fight to save their houses, in part because the concept of land ownership still escapes them, said Yuri A. Klavov, a member of Rechnik's self-appointed administrative council.

"It turns out that the people of Rechnik are unprepared to see themselves as owners of this land," he said. "This is a throwback, dating to the days when we had no rights. A person could not do anything for himself or think for himself and did not want to."

#4

Officer Takes On Russian Police Via YouTube, Costing Him His Job

By Brian Whitmore

RFE/RL, November 9, 2009

Routine falsification of evidence. Pressure to arrest the innocent. Poor working conditions. And a low salary.

Aleksei Dymovsky, a police major in the Black Sea port town of Novorossiisk, finally decided enough was enough. So last week he blew the whistle -- over the Internet. The move cost him his job, and he now says he fears for his life.

The incident is just the latest embarrassment for Russia's law-enforcement community, which has been accused by rights groups and the public of endemic corruption, incompetence, and brutality.

On November 5, Dymovsky posted two videos to his website that quickly went viral, getting hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube. The videos show Dymovsky spelling out a long list of allegations against the local police force. Among other things, he alleged that his bosses routinely order officers to make up criminal cases against innocent people in order to cover up police inability to track down real criminals.

"I'm sick and tired of being told to solve crimes that don't exist. I'm sick and tired of being told to put [innocent] people in jail. I'm sick and tired of made-to-order criminal cases. I'm sick and tired of all that," Dymovsky said.

Speaking at a press conference in Krasnodar on November 9, Dymovsky said he was being followed and that his phone was tapped. He has sent his wife -- who is six months pregnant -- to Moscow for her safety.

Dymovsky, who plans to hold another press conference in Moscow on November 10, says he has documents in his possession that will prove his allegations -- but said he would only give them to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin himself.

In his video, Dymovsky offered to "expose police corruption in all of Russia" and repeatedly appealed to Putin to intervene.

"I will show you, from the inside, the life of cops across Russia, with their corruption, ignorance, boorishness, and recklessness, where honest officers die because of their dim-witted bosses," Dymovsky said.

'Investigation Complete'

Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev initially ordered an investigation into Dymovsky's allegations on November 7. But hours later, a ministry spokesman announced that the investigation was complete, and that Dymovsky, a 10-year police veteran, had been fired for slandering his colleagues.

"Our inquiry did not confirm any of these facts. Therefore, by the order of the Krasnodar Krai police chief, Major Dymovsky was dismissed for slandering his fellow police officers and commanders, and for misconduct unbecoming a police officer," Interior Ministry spokesman Oleg Yelnikov told reporters in Moscow on November 9.

Neither Putin nor President Dmitry Medvedev has responded publicly to Dymovsky's allegations. Russia's Public Chamber, a government oversight body, says they should be investigated.

"The Moscow Times" quoted attorney Anatoly Kucherena, who heads the chamber's law-enforcement committee, as saying Dymovsky should be given "protection to avoid sanctions and prosecution."

Attorney Vladimir Volkov, a former prosecutor, tells RFE/RL's Russian Service that Dymovsky's allegations only scratch the surface of the malfeasance among the country's police.

"Of course what he said is true. What's more, Dymovsky doesn't even know the whole truth," Volkov said.

"The truth is even more terrible with the Moscow police. They long ago have fallen into sin. There are many unsolved killings in Moscow that I believe they are accountable for. People are being killed, beaten to death, and robbed."

Russia's police have come under increased scrutiny since April, when Denis Yevsyukov, a Moscow police officer, killed three people and wounded six more in a shooting rampage at a supermarket. Medvedev fired Moscow's police chief several days after the shooting.

In October, Buryatia's Interior Minister Viktor Syusyura and his deputy were arrested in connection with an alleged jewelry contraband racket.

Also in October, Medvedev sacked the chief of the Tuva region's police force, Viktor Lesnik, after a local policeman killed a fellow officer and then shot himself.

#5

Recalling Soviet days, Sharansky hits home for Jewish Agency

By Jacob Berkman

JTA, November 9, 2009

Yesterday, the CEO of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Steve Schwager gave his pitch for more money from the federation. Today it was the turn of the new chairman of the Jewish Agency, Natan Sharansky.

This was the fourth time that I have seen Sharansky speak in the past week, and he clearly saved his best for the biggest stage, 2,000 or so people here for the warm up act for Israel's prime minister, Bibi Netanyahu.

Sharansky, who is a longtime personal and political ally of Netanyahu, and who was put in place as the Jewish Agency head by Netanyahu, certainly gave his friend a rousing set up.

Sharansky got received a standing ovation as he took the stage to regal music, befitting of the savior that many in the embattled Jewish Agency believe that he is.

On the 20th anniversary of the day that the Berlin Wall fell – an event in which Sharansky the former famous Soviet dissident played a major role – the Jewish Agency chairman drew more heavily on his past than I have seen him on this speaking tour.

When he was a foot soldier in the struggle for the freedom of Soviet Jewry and the fight to bring down the Iron Curtain, Sharansky said that he was often told that he had to choose between the universal cause and the specific national Jewish cause.

But that choice that he had to make in the struggle for freedom is not all that different from the struggle for identity that Jews today face.

"In the post nationalist, post identity world where people are once again asked to make a choice. Do you believe in the universal value of human rights you are told why do you hold onto individual nationalism. Do we really want to shelter ourselves in the cocoon of a Jewish state?" he asked. "When one young Jew believes he or she must make a choice that he or she cannot belong to both, then they make the choice in favor of universalism, then assimilation erodes our community. Our detractors sense our weakness and our hesitation."

Sharansky is clearly positioning the Jewish Agency as an identity building organization.

"Identity strengthening is the best answer in the struggle for the freedom of Israel," he said. The most important thing today, like yesterday, 20 years ago is the return to our Jewish roots. Rebuilding our Jewish identity can allow us to fight for tikun olam everywhere, for justice and for freedom for everyone.

#6

Young Russians' About-Face From the West

By Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova

Newsweek.com, November 5, 2009

When the Berlin Wall collapsed, most young, educated Russians aspired to what could broadly be described as Western values: democracy, free speech, anti-imperialism. Teenagers were infatuated with Western music and clothes (all the more attractive because they were forbidden), while older Russian intellectuals echoed their Eastern European dissident colleagues in calling for a reckoning with the past, the turning of a new leaf and building an open society. Everything about Soviet society, from its clothes to its ideas, seemed drab and clunky compared with the vibrant, thriving West.

What a difference a few years make. Central and Eastern Europe have slipped largely into Europe's cultural and political fold. But in Russia, thanks to a decade of anti-Western fervor propagated by the Kremlin, a new generation is growing up strikingly out of sync with the West. "Back in the perestroika years, young intellectuals sincerely believed in certain things, like freedom of speech and transparency of the state," says Maria Lipman, a fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center. "The generation who grew up in the Putin era have a completely different mentality. Modern pro-Kremlin youth groups are so well fed by the state that they've grown faithful as tame dogs." The result is a generation that not only buys into the Kremlin's world view, but is also deeply distrustful of anybody who thinks differently.

Denis Volkov, of the Moscow Levada Center, has studied the attitudes of Russia's youth toward the West and its values and uncovered a scary picture. Over the past decade, numbers have been falling. A poll last month showed that 40 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds have a "negative" attitude towards the U.S., not far behind those over 55, a Soviet-era generation that has long been steeped in anti-Western propaganda. And in a kind of demented historical throwback, Stalin is once again in favor. More than half the older crowd said they felt "positively" about the Soviet leader, while more than a quarter of young people agreed, up from just over 15 percent at the turn of the millennium. A generation after their forebears hankered after blue jeans and tapes of Western music, young Russians now wear the same clothes and listen to much of the same music as their Western counterparts. But while they may look more Western, there is a deep and widening divide in their attitudes, according to the Levada Center's statistics.

The rollback of pro-Western attitudes is largely a direct result of a concerted state policy aimed at shaping the hearts and minds of Russian youth, led by Putin and executed by his chief ideologist, Vladislav Surkov. Across Russia, state-created youth groups are stepping up efforts to shape the hearts and minds of Russian youth by organizing camps, congresses, and talent competitions, just like the Komsomol, the youth branch of the Soviet Communist Party, did once upon a time. By no means are all of them sinister, but they are all political. The youth-led Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and 2004 came as a deep shock to the Kremlin, which suddenly feared that a similar grassroots revolution could destabilize Russia. In response, Putin's regime unleashed the mind-warping assault, says Stanislav Belkovsky of the Moscow-based National Strategy Institute, who worked with the Kremlin on promoting pro-Russian candidates in the 2004 Ukrainian election.

Surkov and other top Kremlin ideologues quickly ordered a slew of anti-Western television propaganda casting George W. Bush's campaign to spread democracy in the Middle East as an attack on Russia. Surkov characterized Ukrainian democracy as chaotic and the Georgian leadership as corrupt. He also created several state-funded youth groups, such as Nashi ("Ours") and the Young Guards. At the height of the regime's paranoia about the possibility of an Orange Revolution in Russia, circa 2005 to 2006, these youth groups numbered up to half a million members and dominated campuses with a strongly nationalistic, anti-Western philosophy. "Putin's television anti-Western propaganda has done its dirty business," says Lipman. "Young Russians are cynical people who believe that Russia is surrounded with enemies, that the West does not want Russia to grow stronger." The last generation of liberals now tend to be older, people who are now between 25 and 35. Everybody younger, says Lipman, "is a proud patriot who dislikes the West."

Ella Panfilova, an adviser to President Dmitry Medvedev on human-rights issues, underscores the problem. "The state should not participate in youth movements at all," she says. "Most young people in Kremlin-organized youth movements still have a Cold War mindset. It is not right for Russian authorities to divide young people into those who are members of Nashi and the rest."

The political journey of Andrei Tatarinov, 21 years old, is a perfect microcosm of many of his generation. In the early 2000s, while still at school, he was an opposition activist and went to street protests that were violently dispersed by police. He quit in 2006 because, he says, human-rights campaigner Lev Ponomarev "hurt my patriotic feelings" with his talk of returning the Kuril Islands to Japan and allowing foreign oil companies access to Russian energy reserves. Both ideas are considered treacherous by Russian nationalists. Now Tatarinov is the political leader of the Young Guards youth group, and part of United Russia, the official pro-Kremlin party that dominates the Duma. He is unabashed in his stance. "We do not tolerate anti-Russian talk," Tatarinov says. "Everybody who wants Russia to grow weak is our enemy."

And the Young Guards are on the move. As proof of their zealotry in weeding out any hint of Orange revolutionaries, on Oct. 15 the Young Guards organized a picket of liberal governor Nikita Belykh's offices in the northern Russian town of Kirov. The governor's crime, according to the Young Guards, was to have been the former leader of one of Russia's main opposition parties, the Union of Right Forces. Furthermore, Belykh had raised the suspicions of local Young Guards activists by inviting Western-leaning Russians as guests to regional conferences. "Belykh is friends with people who financed the Orange Revolution," says Ruslan Gatarov, 31, who helped to organize the Oct. 15 protest. "He invites Orange-type guests like [human-rights campaigner] Ilya Ponomarev to his region. We have a saying in Russian: 'Tell me who your friend is, and I will tell you who you are.' " Even appearing to be too pro-Western, it seems, is a dangerous sin in the eyes of the Putin youth.

Nationwide hysteria about the threat of an Orange Revolution may have died down, but the Kremlin's youth movements are still busy. Recent Young Guards camps at Lake Seliger and in 10 other regions focused on getting young people to present new technology and business projects. The winners were tech schemes with a Russian twist, such as a computer operating system called Russian Windows and a photo program called Russian Photoshop. "We have to be prepared for the day America turns off the Internet for us, and have our servers covering our own Internet," says Tatarinov. "Now we have a chance to collect all the best ideas on how to modernize Russia and send them directly to the president."

Paranoid as the Young Guards projects may sound, they're undoubtedly popular among young people who see that getting involved with a Kremlin-sponsored project is the best path to professional advancement. "Most young people today are career-focused," says Lipman. "They know that [state-owned companies like] Gazprom and Rosneft are the best employers, and the closer you get to the state, the more chances you have to get a job. It does not matter to them much what the ideology is."

Earlier this month at a Kremlin-organized youth camp at Selias, near the southern Russian town of Astrakhan, a crowd of several hundred young people waited around a stage—for a politician. They'd come for a free concert, the social life, and for the chance to be noticed by visiting Moscow political hotshots. "Hello, Selias! Do you feel lucky to be here?" yelled Sergey Markov, a member of Parliament from the Kremlin-created United Russia party, running onto the stage in baggy cargo pants and a sweatshirt. "You're in the right place at the right time! We'll choose the most talented [of you] here, and the best ones might even come to Moscow to work for me!" Selias is a strange combination of talent competition and ideological boot camp. Experts and consultants meet with young people in six large tents to help them develop projects in fields such as youth, municipal, or regional policy; technology; or local tourism. Most important, the organizers bring government cash and can dispense development grants of up to \$3,300.

Russia's dwindling number of Boris Yeltsin-era liberals find such attitudes scarily reminiscent of Soviet-era groupthink. A recent campaign mounted by Nashi activists in Moscow against a dissident journalist likewise shows that the Kremlin-backed youth groups are growing more powerful than ever, and that they're repeating the kind of harassment of independent thinkers common in the 1970s. Last month Alexander Podrabinek, a political prisoner under Brezhnev, wrote a story criticizing war veterans for praising the U.S.S.R. without acknowledging the Soviet Union's harsh repression of dissent and use of gulags. In response, Nashi activists picketed outside Podrabinek's apartment building, threatened his life, and publicly challenged him to leave Russia if he didn't like it. When presidential human-rights adviser Ella Panfilova stood up for Podrabinek and labeled Nashi an "extremist

organization," she was quickly slapped down by United Russia and by Putin himself, who dismissed Podrabinek's article as "hooliganistic."

"Moscow's politics is now concentrated on finding the most talented young people in the regions who will be able to save Russia from economic crises," says Evgeny Nizhnik, 31, a charismatic youth leader who has been involved in youth politics since 1991. "Chaos, cheap drugs, alcoholism, and racism were the result of unlimited democracy in the 1990s. Russian youth needs a strong grip in order not to get lost in chaos." Of course, another side effect of that strong grip is to prevent dangerously independent thoughts that could challenge the Kremlin's hold on power. It's a sad outcome for those who hoped to see a young generation use the new freedoms won after the fall of the Berlin Wall to embrace liberal values.

#7

**U.S. officials optimistic about new nuclear treaty with Russia
Kremlin says there is 'every chance' to agree on START successor
By Mary Beth Sheridan and Walter Pincus
Washington Post, November 8, 2009**

After months of negotiations with Russia, Obama administration officials are hopeful about a breakthrough -- possibly this week -- that would enable the two sides to sign a successor to their most extensive nuclear weapons treaty before it expires Dec. 5.

The optimism stems from a trip to Moscow in late October by national security adviser James L. Jones, who gave his Kremlin counterpart a package of proposals for the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, according to U.S. and Russian officials. Moscow has not yet formally responded, but high-level Russian officials have reacted positively, senior U.S. officials said.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in remarks released Saturday that both sides "have every chance to agree on a new treaty, determine new [weapons] levels and control measures and sign a legally binding document [by] the end of the year." With U.S. policymakers and the Pentagon united behind Jones's proposals, Kremlin policymakers have gone back to the Russian military to get its approval or perhaps recommendations for counterproposals.

Securing a replacement for the 1991 treaty is a critical first step in President Obama's ambitious global arms-control agenda. Analysts and lawmakers have watched nervously as the agreement's deadline approaches, fearing a lapse in the complex verification procedures that are credited with providing stability between the nuclear giants. Both sides have discussed leaving those procedures in place until a new pact goes into effect.

U.S. officials' optimism contrasted with concerns expressed recently by American and Russian analysts that the talks have not produced final agreement on key issues: limits on nuclear-capable launchers; verification procedures; U.S. proposals to put conventional warheads on strategic land- and submarine-based ballistic missiles; and missile defense systems. The United States remains reluctant to give much ground on a Russian request for strong language linking disarmament to missile defense.

The new START agreement will contain relatively modest cuts in the 1,700 to 2,200 deployed warheads allowed to each side under a June 2002 agreement between President George W. Bush and then-Russian President Vladimir Putin. At a summit in July, Obama and Medvedev agreed on a new ceiling of 1,500 to 1,675 for each side.

A more contentious issue has been reducing the number of nuclear-capable bombers and land- or submarine-based missiles, with the Russians pressing for deeper cuts than the U.S. side. The Russians have proposed that the current limit of 1,600 each be slashed to 500; U.S. negotiators have suggested 1,100. Jones's proposal was a "judicious compromise," a U.S. official said, without disclosing a figure. Outside speculation has put the number at about 700.

The Russians still want that total to include any strategic missile launchers that carry conventional rather than nuclear warheads, a position the U.S. negotiators may accept.

Another debate focuses on verification programs. The Russians have talked of halting U.S. inspections of their missile factories because they have no equal role in the United States, which is no longer building strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Although a new accord seems within reach by Dec. 5, it is still not likely to win ratification in the U.S. Senate for months. With that in mind, Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.) introduced a bill Thursday that would allow Obama to temporarily extend, on a reciprocal basis, privileges to Russian arms inspection teams that travel to the United States.

"Allowing a break in verification activities is not in the interest of the United States or Russia," Lugar said on the Senate floor.

Senior U.S. officials told The Washington Post that they also want to put in place a "bridge mechanism" when the treaty expires to allow for the continuation of inspections, exchanges of data, and notification about the testing and movement of weapons and other changes. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the talks.

The United States and Russia control more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, and both sides have said they hope that shrinking their stockpiles will inspire other nations to support tougher measures to prevent the spread of the deadly weapons to countries such as Iran.

A Russian response to Jones's proposals is expected soon, perhaps when both sides return to the negotiating table in Geneva on Monday.

"We hope that this will be the last round and that by December 5 we will have agreed on a new accord," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko told the Interfax news agency, according to Agence France-Presse.

Ellen O. Tauscher, the undersecretary of state who oversees arms control and who accompanied Jones to Moscow, said, "There are issues that we have to work through, but there is also a path forward."

Even if a new treaty is signed soon, there is no chance it will be sent to the Senate for ratification before next year. Administration officials recognize that they have to prepare extensive backup material based on questions already raised by key Republicans, including Sen. Jon Kyl (Ariz.), who has been monitoring the talks.

#8

The Legacy of 1989 Is Still Up for Debate

By Steven Erlanger

New York Times November 9, 2009

The historical legacy of 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell and the cold war thawed, is as political as the upheavals of that decisive year.

The events of 1989 spurred a striking transformation of Europe, which is now whole and free, and a reunified Germany, milestones that are being observed with celebrations all over the continent, including a French-German extravaganza Monday evening on the Place de la Concorde.

But 1989 also created new divisions and fierce nationalisms that hobble the European Union today, between East and West, France and Germany, Europe and Russia.

Some of the intensity of those divisions is evident in the tug of war, in both Europe and the United States, over the achievements of 1989 → whether they owe more to the resolute anti-Communism of Ronald Reagan or its inverse, the white-glove embrace of the East by many in Western Europe.

And while many in the West saw the wheel of history spinning inevitably, causing the rise of democracy and banishing serious rivals to American power, China forestalled its own revolution in 1989 and catapulted itself to prominence through an authoritarian capitalism that the leaders of Russia are now studying.

“The Chinese ended up with a Leninist capitalism, which none of us imagined in 1989, and which is now the main ideological competitor to Western liberal democracy,” said Timothy Garton Ash, a chronicler of 1989 in his book “The Magic Lantern.”

It is a tribute to 1989, not unlike the French Revolution 200 years before it, that its meaning is hotly contested. Different groups in different countries see the anniversary differently, usually from their own ideological points of view.

In general, said James M. Goldgeier of George Washington University, a historian of the period, “the big question out there for 20 years is who gets the credit.”

For many in the United States, he said, most of the credit now goes to President Ronald Reagan and his aggressive military spending and antagonism toward Communism. That view has largely eclipsed another American perspective, which was that globalization and democratization were so powerful that a Mikhail Gorbachev was inevitable, and that the cold war ended through “soft power” → propaganda, diplomacy and the Helsinki accords.

“As the partisan divide over Reagan has dissipated, I think over time most Americans, if they think back at all, say it was Reagan who said, ‘Tear down this wall,’ and down it came,” Professor Goldgeier said.

Robert Kagan, a historian with the Carnegie Endowment in Washington and an editor of The Weekly Standard, said conservatives won the debate. “The standard narrative is Reagan,” he said.

This is not the case in Europe, Mr. Kagan said. “If 90 percent of Americans say it was the U.S. being firm, 99 percent of Europeans think it was they being soft → that the wall fell through Ostpolitik and West German TV.”

For many Americans of both political parties, 1989 seemed a wonderful example of the embrace of universal values that happened to be theirs, and some believed it was only a matter of time before all dictatorships crumbled before the same forces of strength, openness, economic liberalism and people power.

Democrats argue that President George W. Bush learned the wrong lesson from 1989, about the utility of force, and Republicans argue that President Bill Clinton and President Obama learned the wrong lesson → that “engagement” with totalitarian power, whether in China or Iran, will weaken or destroy it.

For all the disagreements, however, said Ronald D. Asmus, a deputy assistant secretary of state for Europe in the Clinton administration and Brussels director of the German Marshall Fund, what happened was simply amazing.

“If someone asked me in ’89 if we would have all these countries in NATO and the European Union, I would have been incredulous,” Mr. Asmus said. “We’ve lost sight of an incredible historical achievement → the heart of Central and Eastern Europe is at peace. All problems are not fully solved, but they are tempered, controlled and contained, and we have a better chance of solving them.”

Even the brief war last year between Georgia and Russia would have been very different without NATO, Mr. Asmus argued. “These are not existential issues anymore,” he said. “They’re not presidential problems, but assistant secretary of state problems.”

Russia remains a challenge for both the United States and Europe, but a much safer one, argues Sergei Karaganov, who leads the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy in Moscow and was an adviser to the Russian presidents Boris N. Yeltsin and Vladimir V. Putin.

In Russia, Mr. Gorbachev, the last Soviet president, is widely despised for indecisiveness and for permitting the collapse of the empire, an event that Mr. Putin called the greatest geostrategic catastrophe of the last century.

Not all Russians agree, but many do argue that the end of the Warsaw Pact should have led to the disbanding of NATO, or at least a decision not to expand the alliance to include states that were once part of the Soviet Union.

“The U.S. regarded itself as the victor in the cold war, but Russia does not regard itself as the loser,” Mr. Karaganov said. “At the very least we expected an honorable peace. Like Britain, we have never been defeated, and we remain ready to fight.”

“Hindsight is seductive, but there were a number of alternative futures from 1989,” said Mary Elise Sarotte, who has just published “1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe.” “The West chose a future that perpetuated a divided Europe and left Russia on the periphery.”

One result of 1989 was the end of a bipolar world, but after a brief 20-year reign the period of American unipolarity is also ending, many Europeans say.

For Hubert Vedrine, a former French foreign minister who worked then for President Francois Mitterrand, 1989 led to a Western arrogance that is only slowly deflating with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and against Islamic radicalism.

“People mix the fall of the wall with the fall of Jericho in the Bible, as in, ‘We’ve won; history is over,’ etc.,” he said. “But to me it’s the beginning, it’s the prologue of an opera with a cymbal crash, the prologue of 15 to 20 years of Western arrogance.”

A scramble for power and influence among several nations and blocs of nations – Europe, China, Russia, India, Brazil and the United States – now seems likely. Dominique Moisi of the French Institute for International Relations said, “America is in relative decline, but has not yet accepted the changes, speaking of multilateralism but not accepting the consequences.” In this transitional world, he said, “nothing can be done without America, but nothing can be done by America alone.”

But Americans are not likely to agree with this interpretation. Robert D. Blackwill, a longtime diplomat and adviser to Presidents George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush, argues for the necessity of American leadership. “I see no evidence that America is in decline,” he said.

In Central Europe itself, there are serious divisions over 1989, symbolized by the long and bitter rivalry in the Czech Republic between Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus, between a softer collective polity, anchored by Europe, and a fierce individualist liberalism reluctant to give up sovereignty to the European Union that was so recently regained from the Soviet collapse.

In the eyes of many in the old West, the events of 1989 enlarged but also diluted the European Union. The union has struggled ever since over how to deepen and solidify the alliance. “There is a kind of melancholia toward Europe for part of the French, because in this whole, one has to negotiate with everyone,” Mr. Vedrine said.

For Mr. Garton Ash, the divide remains between Western and Eastern Europe. “We hoped as Europeans that 1989 would be a second founding moment for the European project, and that this would become a pan-European memory and a shared cause for celebration,” he said. “But that hasn’t happened. ‘Eastern Europe’ still exists in the collective memory and we haven’t purged it.”

Many people in the East, of course, suffered from 1989 and the sudden, even brutal switch to capitalism. “They feel the transition was very tough on them and feel cheated and even betrayed, and are open to conspiracy theories about shady deals done at the round tables,” Mr. Garton Ash said.

“It’s not like the way in Britain we remember V-E Day,” when Nazi Germany surrendered, he said. “It’s really quite divided.”

#9

Power for U.S. From Russia’s Old Nuclear Weapons

By Andrew E. Kramer

New York Times, November 10, 2009

MOSCOW — What’s powering your home appliances?

For about 10 percent of electricity in the United States, it’s fuel from dismantled nuclear bombs, including Russian ones.

“It’s a great, easy source” of fuel, said Marina V. Alekseyenkova, an analyst at Renaissance Capital and an expert in the Russian nuclear industry that has profited from the arrangement since the end of the cold war.

But if more diluted weapons-grade uranium isn't secured soon, the pipeline could run dry, with ramifications for consumers, as well as some American utilities and their Russian suppliers.

Already nervous about a supply gap, utilities operating America's 104 nuclear reactors are paying as much attention to President Obama's efforts to conclude a new arms treaty as the Nobel Peace Prize committee did.

In the last two decades, nuclear disarmament has become an integral part of the electricity industry, little known to most Americans.

Salvaged bomb material now generates about 10 percent of electricity in the United States — by comparison, hydropower generates about 6 percent and solar, biomass, wind and geothermal together account for 3 percent.

Utilities have been loath to publicize the Russian bomb supply line for fear of spooking consumers: the fuel from missiles that may have once been aimed at your home may now be lighting it.

But at times, recycled Soviet bomb cores have made up the majority of the American market for low-enriched uranium fuel. Today, former bomb material from Russia accounts for 45 percent of the fuel in American nuclear reactors, while another 5 percent comes from American bombs, according to the Nuclear Energy Institute, an industry trade association in Washington.

Treaties at the end of the cold war led to the decommissioning of thousands of warheads. Their energy-rich cores are converted into civilian reactor fuel.

In the United States, the agreements are portrayed as nonproliferation treaties — intended to prevent loose nukes in Russia.

In Russia, where the government argues that fissile materials are impenetrably secure already, the arms agreements are portrayed as a way to make it harder for the United States to reverse disarmament.

The program for dismantling and diluting the fuel cores of decommissioned Russian warheads — known informally as Megatons to Megawatts — is set to expire in 2013, just as the industry is trying to sell it forcefully as an alternative to coal-powered energy plants, which emit greenhouse gases.

Finding a substitute is a concern for utilities today because nuclear plants buy fuel three to five years in advance.

One potential new source is warheads that would become superfluous if the United States and Russia agree to new cuts under negotiations to renew the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires on Dec. 5.

Such negotiations revolve around the number of deployed weapons and delivery vehicles. There is no requirement in the treaty that bomb cores be destroyed. That is negotiated separately.

For the industry, that means that now, as in the past, there will be no direct correlation between the number of warheads decommissioned and the quantity of highly enriched uranium or plutonium, also used in weapons, that the two countries declare surplus.

(This summer, Mr. Obama and President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia agreed to a new limit on delivery vehicles of 500 to 1,100 and a limit on deployed warheads as low as 1,500. The United States now has about 2,200 nuclear warheads and the Russians 2,800.)

Mr. Medvedev has reaffirmed Russia's commitment to a 2000 agreement to dispose of plutonium, and both countries plan to convert that into reactor fuel as well.

An American diplomat and an official with a federal nuclear agency in Washington have confirmed, separately, that the two countries are quietly negotiating another agreement to continue diluting Russia's highly enriched uranium after the expiration of Megatons to Megawatts, using some or all of the material from warheads likely to be taken out of the arsenals.

The government officials were not authorized to publicly discuss these efforts.

This possible successor deal to Megatons to Megawatts is known in the industry as HEU-2, for a High Enriched Uranium-2, and companies are rooting for it, according to Jeff Combs, president and owner of Ux Consulting, a company tracking uranium fuel pricing.

“You can look at it like a couple of very large uranium mines,” he said of the fissile material that would result from the program.

American reactors would not shut down without a deal; utilities could turn to commercial imports, which would most likely be much more expensive.

Enriching raw uranium is more expensive than converting highly enriched uranium to fuel grade.

To make fuel for electricity-generating reactors, uranium is enriched to less than 5 percent of the isotope U-235. To make weapons, it is enriched to about 90 percent U-235.

The United States Enrichment Corporation, a private company spun off from the Department of Energy in the 1990s, is the treaty-designated agent on the Russian imports. It, in turn, sells the fuel to utilities at prevailing market prices, an arrangement that at times has angered the Russians.

Since Megatons to Megawatts has existed, American utilities operating nuclear power plants, like Pacific Gas & Electric or Constellation Energy, have benefited as the abundance of fuel that came onto the market drastically reduced overall prices and created savings that were ultimately passed along to consumers and shareholders.

Nuclear industry giants like Areva, the French company; the United States Enrichment Corporation and Nuclear Fuel Services, another American company; and Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear corporation, are deeply involved in recycling weapons material and will need new supplies to continue that side of their businesses.

In the United States, domestic weapons recycling programs are smaller in scale and would be no replacement for Megatons for Megawatts. The Nuclear Fuel Services, in Erwin, Tenn., in 2005 began diluting uranium from the 217 tons the government declared surplus; so far 125 tons have been processed. It is used at the Tennessee Valley Authority plant.

The American plutonium recycling program is also well under way at a factory being built at the Energy Department’s Savannah River site in South Carolina to dismantle warheads from the American arsenal; a type of plutonium fuel, called mixed-oxide fuel, will come on the market in 2017.

In total, the 34 tons to be recycled there are expected to generate enough electricity for a million American homes for 50 years.

#10

The Best Way to Deal With Nationalists

By Leonid Gozman

Moscow Times, November 10, 2009

The Russian government virtually handed nationalists their own special holiday on a silver platter by establishing People’s Unity Day on Nov. 4. The nationalists have their own interpretation of Unity Day. For many of them, the holiday is not only a celebration of Russia’s “cleansing” of the Polish invaders, but of all of its perennial enemies.

Although the state-run television channels ignored the Russian March, the nationalists’ main public demonstration on Unity Day, this does not change the views or intentions of its participants or the people who watched it in approval. There is nothing worth panicking about here, but ignoring the danger would be a mistake.

What should be done?

First, an education campaign against nationalist extremism needs to be instituted. Of course, everyone should understand that there can be no quick-fix remedies to the problem. The Americans were able to radically change race relations in the United States over the course of a generation by using everything under the sun: Ending racial segregation in schools, showing white and African-American police officers partnering up in the heat of battle for justice for hours and hours on television and much more.

The same can be accomplished in Russia. Our country has never had a single ethnicity or religion, while all victories and advancements have always been linked with openness and tolerance. Take a look at the list of Soviet heroes from World War II, or of those who created the atomic bomb and prepared Yury Gagarin's landmark space flight. Glance at the policies of Catherine and Peter the Great. Look at the names of commanders from the War of 1812 with Napoleon. It is clear from Russia's history that the country is made up of people from various faiths, nationalities and backgrounds.

Second, the nationalists should have their own political representation, just as their cohorts do in the majority of European countries and just as the Communists do in Russia. It is pointless to act as if they don't even exist. If they have their own political party, one that is regulated by the law, then it will be possible to debate with them on a public platform and build unions and coalitions to fight them.

Once there is a public debate with the nationalists, I am convinced that the vast majority of Russians will reject their doctrine. Having an image of being persecuted or banished will only add to their popularity. Hostile ideologies, such as fascism and communism, needs to be confronted face to face.

Third, nationalist declarations and actions that violate the Constitution should be prosecuted according to the law. This will be easier to do if the nationalists have their own party because they will be more open and intelligible.

Another problem is that many people in the country's law enforcement agencies sympathize with the nationalists. Given the country's poor record on protecting human rights, it is very important that the police don't end up serving the nationalists' interests. Member of Russia's law enforcement agencies are trained to follow orders, and it is very important that the wrong orders are not given in the first place.

Leonid Gozman is a co-founder of the Right Cause party.

#11

Is Russia playing both sides on Iran nukes?

By Howard LaFranchi

Christian Science Monitor, November 10, 2009

Washington - Iran's failure to respond to an international offer to enrich much of its uranium stockpile outside the country – for use in a Tehran medical research facility – is again raising the prospect of tougher sanctions.

Much of the focus of the sanctions debate is falling on Russia, which has blown hot and cold on additional punitive measures on Iran over its nuclear program – but which is sounding open to the idea once again. The attention is reviving lingering questions about Russian assistance – either official or unauthorized – to Iran's nuclear program and weapons research.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and French President Nicolas Sarkozy issued a statement Monday warning Iran that "the international community's patience is not infinite." The two leaders, in Berlin for the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, said they "do not rule out" another round of sanctions aimed at the Iranian leadership and its advancing nuclear program.

Those words followed comments by President Medvedev over the weekend to German journalists, when he suggested that Russia could support additional sanctions if Iran fails to take the opportunity to cooperate with world powers in its nuclear program. Noting the offers now before the Iranian leadership, Medvedev told Germany's Der Spiegel magazine, "I wouldn't like to see all that ending in the introduction of international sanctions ... but if there is no movement forward, no one is excluding such a scenario."

The US, Russia, and France last month negotiated a deal with Iranian officials to remove almost three-quarters of Iran's slightly-enriched uranium stockpile to Russia and France for further enrichment to a level needed for a research reactor. Removal of the uranium would ease international concerns about Iran's nuclear intentions and allow for what the Obama administration hopes would be fruitful negotiations with Iran on a range of issues.

But Iranian state media reports and statements from some Iranian lawmakers suggest the government will reject the deal – perhaps offering to buy the uranium it needs for its reactor and moving its uranium stockpile to a domestic location for international surveillance instead.

Eyes have turned to Russia because, as a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, it could squelch any move to impose additional sanctions through the council. China also holds veto power in the Security Council and has discouraged talk of a new sanctions resolution, but some diplomats believe that it would go along if Russia decided to support new punitive measures.

Russia also has close economic ties to Iran and a history of cooperation with Iran on both its nuclear program and defensive military development.

"There's quite a bit of military cooperation between the two countries, and suspected nuclear cooperation before '04," says David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington.

Officially, Russia has sold defensive missile systems to Tehran – though it is currently holding up delivery of a more sophisticated surface-to-air system, drawing protests from Iranian officials. "The Russians seem to modulate that cooperation depending on how things are going," Mr. Albright says, noting there could be a connection between Iran's lack of response to the uranium deal and the Russian brakes on delivery of the new missile system.

But suspicions have also grown over the last year that Russian scientists, perhaps acting in an unofficial or "rogue" capacity, have been assisting their Iranian colleagues in pursuit of a nuclear weapon and weapons delivery systems. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is believed to have flown secretly to Moscow in September to present Medvedev and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin with a list of names of Russian scientists that Israel says took nuclear know-how to Iran.

Those reports have prompted some members of Congress to pressure President Obama to report to Congress on suspected Russia-Iran nuclear cooperation before the US pursues any new or additional nuclear accords with Russia.

#12

Iran urges Russia to deliver overdue missiles

RIA Novosti, November 13, 2009

MOSCOW - A top Iranian military official on Friday urged Russia to honor its bilateral military contract and deliver the promised S-300 surface-to-air missiles, the Mehr news agency reported.

Gen. Hassan Firouzabadi said Russia was six months behind schedule with deliveries of advanced air-defense systems.

"Why haven't they delivered the S-300 missiles? Six months have now passed since they were supposed to deliver them," he said.

Russia signed a contract with Iran on the supply of S-300 air defense systems to the Islamic Republic in December 2005. However, there have been no official reports on the start of the contract's implementation since then.

The possible deliveries of S-300 missiles to Iran have aroused serious concern in the West and in Israel.

"Russia has to fulfill the contract and not be influenced by Zionist pressure," Firouzabadi said.

A Russian government official on Thursday said Moscow would not freeze the contract as a concession to the United States.

The official denied media speculations that Russia could freeze the Iranian contract in exchange for Washington's decision not to place interceptor missiles in Poland and a missile tracking radar in the Czech Republic.

The latest version of the S-300 series is the S-300PMU2 Favorit, which has a range of up to 195 kilometers (about 120 miles) and can intercept aircraft and ballistic missiles at altitudes from 10 meters to 27 kilometers.

It is considered one of the world's most effective all-altitude regional air defense systems, comparable in performance to the U.S. MIM-104 Patriot system.

Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi urged Russia on Wednesday to fulfill its contract on the supply of S-300 air defense systems to Iran.

#13

Israeli ambassador urges Belarusian authorities to restore synagogues Belaruskiye Novesti, November 10, 2009

The Israeli ambassador to Belarus has urged the authorities to restore synagogues amid a “disastrous” shortage of prayer houses for Jewish communities in the country.

The Belarusian government should pay attention to deteriorating synagogues, which were built with contributions by the faithful, Ambassador Edward (Eddie) Shapira said at an international conference on a Christian-Jewish dialogue that began in Minsk on November 9.

“I do understand that there is no restitution law in the country, but there is a wave of religious revival and the state does not only return churches that once belonged to Orthodox Christian communities but also helps renovate them,” the ambassador said.

Mr. Shapira expressed concern about the condition of the “unique” three-story synagogue in Hrodna. Many tourists, including Jews, visit the city, but it is impossible to invite them to the synagogue hit by “devastation,” he said.

The ambassador also voiced alarm over what he called the unwillingness of law-enforcers to probe attempts to incite national hate “even when they are visible by the naked eye.”

He said that a swastika and an anti-Semitic text were sprayed on the building of the Jewish community in Slutsk, Minsk region, earlier this year, condemning the act as a vivid example of racism.

The ambassador called on the authorities to draw up regulations that would prevent immoderate construction work at old Jewish cemeteries and the sites of the WWII mass execution of Jews, and ensure that human remains discovered at such sites be reburied with proper rituals. //BelaPAN

#14

EU to extend freezing of sanctions on Belarus By David Brunnstrom Reuters, November 12, 2009

BRUSSELS - The European Union will prolong a freeze on restrictions against Belarus next week, but not lift the threat entirely due to a lack of progress on political reform, a draft statement seen on Thursday said.

The European Union imposed a visa ban on Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko and dozens of other officials after he was accused of rigging his 2006 re-election. But the ban was suspended in October 2008 in order to encourage reforms.

A draft statement due to be approved by EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels next Monday and Tuesday said the suspension would be extended until October 2010 to encourage further changes.

The draft statement said the recent release of political prisoners had opened up the possibility for further cooperation between the EU and Belarus, which is a key transit route for Russian energy supplies to the 27-nation bloc.

But the threat of sanctions will not be scrapped entirely given Belarus's lack of progress on democracy. The EU wants to see electoral reform and movement on human rights, including an end to crackdowns on political activity and the media.

Lukashenko said in September he would not be forced into reforms by the European Union. He said he saw no need to change the country's electoral law and that he may run for a fourth term at presidential elections due in early 2011.

As well as political reforms, the EU wants Belarus to impose a moratorium on the use of the death penalty and move rapidly towards its abolition.

#15

The Life, Death and Judaica of a Russian Oligarch

By Gal Beckerman

Forward, November 11, 2009

Like everything else about his colorful life — which ended abruptly and violently in a hail of bullets on a Moscow street in early November — Shabtai von Kalmanovic's large collection of Judaica has been both shrouded in mystery and subject to exaggeration.

There is no quick and easy way to describe Kalmanovic's bizarre existence. He was at times both an agent of the Soviet KGB and the Israeli Shin Bet; he made his money under shady circumstances in apartheid-era South Africa; he recently transformed himself into a promoter of women's basketball, and he was even once rumored to be romantically involved with Liza Minnelli. His end, Moscow police are speculating, came as a result of a business deal gone bad. Speaking on Russian television, a representative of the police team investigating the murder — which took place while Kalmanovic was in his car and stopped at a traffic light — reported that 19 bullets were found littered around the scene. "There's no doubt this was a contract-style crime," the policeman said.

Briefly mentioned in all the stories describing the strange life and death of the diminutive Russian oligarch was his beloved collection of Jewish art and religious objects. Housed in specially outfitted rooms in his office, the assortment of mostly 18th- and 19th-century Torah scrolls, mezuzas, menorahs and archival documents had been growing over the past 13 years. Kalmanovic was a proud collector, and he enjoyed escorting visitors past the glass display cases,

telling the story of each object's provenance. He also loved to boast about how much he had acquired. He even told a Los Angeles Times reporter that his was "the largest collection in Eastern Europe."

That, it turns out, was an embellishment. In the wake of his violent death, though, there is interest in understanding what he did possess, especially as the Moscow Jewish community begins construction on what will be the largest Jewish museum in the world — a project that is slated for completion in 2011 and will include a wing of Judaica.

"Well, it was sort of a joke, but I think it was definitely [the] biggest in Moscow" Lidia Chakovskaya said in reference to Kalmanovic's grandiose claims about his collection. Chakovskaya, who has overseen Kalmanovic's collection for the past three years, is an Oxford-trained art historian who specializes in early Jewish art and works at the State Institute of Art History. "If you count books and documents and postcards and ritual silver, then you actually come to quite an impressive number," she said.

Chakovskaya was vague when describing how Kalmanovic acquired his collection. In calls to the Sotheby's auction house and the major American dealers of Judaica, not a single person had heard of Kalmanovic. "If his collection was significant, believe me, I would have heard of it," said Jonathan Greenstein, a New York-based auctioneer of Judaica.

According to Chakovskaya, Kalmanovic bought many of his objects from others who brought them back from the West. He also acquired much of his collection, she said, from antique shops in Ukraine. His objective, she said, was never to have the most expensive objects.

"The idea of the collection was not to collect as many valuable things as possible, but to collect a collection as such, to make a precedent that there is a Judaica collection in Moscow," Chakovskaya said.

The extent of Kalmanovic's Judaica collection is notable in part because he was not particularly tied into Moscow's Jewish community, according to local communal leaders.

Indeed, Kalmanovic was a collector of much more than Judaica: Other rooms in his offices were filled with Fabergé eggs, Soviet realist art and hand-carved chess sets from before the revolution.

Kalmanovic seems to have had a complicated relationship with his Jewishness. His collection was a sign that he embraced it to some degree. But there were other moments in his past when his actions toward other Jews could best be described as disdain.

Born in Lithuania in 1947, Kalmanovic applied to immigrate to Israel with his family in 1971. Like many other Soviet Jews at the time, he was offered a deal by the KGB: If he supplied the agency with periodic information, his application for an exit visa would be expedited. He agreed. But unlike others who, once in Israel, never again contacted the Soviets, and reported their deal to the Israeli authorities, Kalmanovic actually stayed in touch with the secret service and, according to a later indictment, periodically offered them information over the next 17 years.

In the meantime, he also made money in Africa. According to a 2001 book by R.T. Naylor, "Economic Warfare: Sanctions, Embargo Busting and Their Human Cost," Kalmanovic first set up shop in Bophuthatswana, one of the Bantustans established by South Africa's apartheid regime. He took advantage of the extremely low labor cost and the lack of regulations so that he could start a construction company whose main function was to win public contracts and then sublet them out to cheaper companies, reaping an easy profit. After South Africa, he moved to Sierra Leone, where he became a huge player, running dozens of farms and mines and even the public transportation system.

In 1986, however, his KGB spying caught up with him, and he spent the next six years in an Israeli jail.

As soon as he was released, he went to Russia and started various businesses, taking advantage, like other emerging oligarchs at the time, of the chaotic economic environment following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

His great passion over the past few years, however, was women's basketball. He poured millions of dollars into supporting the team he owned, Spartak Moscow, by contracting the most talented players of the Women's National Basketball Association and providing them comfortable existences in mansions on the edge of Moscow. He also made his way into the center of Moscow's glitzy social world and became friendly with Iosif Kobzon, a kind of Russian Frank Sinatra who croons in Yiddish and is rumored to have deep ties to Moscow's criminal underworld.

Kobzon and many other actors and musicians were at Kalmanovic's funeral November 4, an elaborate affair at the Vidnoye Sports Complex outside Moscow, which was covered for the occasion in thousands of red roses.

His burial a few days later was much more modest. It took place in Israel's Petah Tikva, where his daughter lives.

Standing at his graveside, she eulogized her father. "I want you to know that I am proud and always will be proud of being your daughter," she said. "You did not put me to shame. You were a spirited Jew and an ardent Zionist."

The question of what will now happen to Kalmanovic's Jewish collection is still unanswered. His daughter has not said what her intentions are for the collection. Chakovskaya said that Kalmanovic had always hoped to open his own museum. Short of that, she said conversations had been under way for his Judaica to be displayed in the new Jewish museum. Being a private collection, Chakovskaya emphasized, it could go anywhere, though she is hoping that it stays in Moscow.

"I don't know about the destiny of this collection," said Mikhail Chlenov, an ethnographer who is the secretary general of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress. "The only thing I can say is that the Jewish community and the Jewish organizations certainly are interested that these objects will be somehow exhibited as a collection of Kalmanovic. How and where is not yet clear."

#16 Rights Activists Refuse to Leave Moscow Center Interfax, November 10, 2009

The Moscow Helsinki Group disagrees with the proposal made by the Moscow authorities to move its headquarters to the south of Moscow.

"We are not going there, and that's it," Moscow Helsinki Group Director Lyudmila Alekseyeva told Interfax on Tuesday.

Two leading Russian human rights organizations earlier said they could suspend their operations due to lease problems in Moscow.

The Moscow property department earlier said the lease contract with the Moscow Helsinki Group had expired and the lease could not be extended because the building where it is now headquartered is subject to reconstruction.

The Moscow authorities said the Moscow Helsinki Group has been offered an office in the southern part of Moscow.

"We don't accept this proposal," Alekseyeva said.

"We are being evicted. We will resist," Alekseyeva said, adding that the human rights activists have turned for help to the human rights ombudsman, the Moscow ombudsman, and the head of the presidential council promoting the development of civil society institutes and human rights in Russia.

The Moscow property department also said the lease contract with the Moscow regional division of the movement For Human Rights had expired in summer 2009. The department says it has requests from many people who live in the building currently occupied by the movement, who the Moscow property department says are asking for the lease contract with the movement not to be extended.

Lev Ponomaryov, the head of the movement For Human Rights, said: "There have been no complaints about us. They are just trying to evict us." Apparently, "someone needs this office," he said.

"We are surprised by the tough pressure put on our organizations, Ponomaryov said.

#17

Russian President Says Modernization Is Needed

By Michael Schwartz

New York Times, November 12, 2009

MOSCOW — President Dmitri A. Medvedev on Thursday called for sweeping reforms to modernize Russia's economy and revamp crumbling industrial and military infrastructure, all while strengthening the country's democratic institutions.

Mr. Medvedev addressed these issues, as well as corruption and law enforcement, in his annual state of the nation speech.

"In the 21st century, our country again requires modernization in all areas, and this will be the first time in our history when modernization will be based on the values and institutions of democracy," Mr. Medvedev said.

Since assuming the presidency in 2008, Mr. Medvedev has sought to cast himself as a reformer and moderate, in contrast to the often hard-line, conservative approach of his predecessor, Vladimir V. Putin, who is now prime minister.

Mr. Medvedev refrained from directly criticizing Mr. Putin, who was in attendance for the speech at an ornate Kremlin hall in Moscow. But his remarks did challenge the top-heavy system that Mr. Putin created in his eight years as president.

He vowed that Russia's reliance on state-run monopolies, a signature feature of Mr. Putin's economic strategy, would end. He also called for a more pragmatic approach to foreign relations, challenging the contentious foreign policy style of his predecessor.

Mr. Medvedev also offered measured criticism of the country's rampant corruption, particularly among the police, though he offered few concrete proposals for reform.

He left open the possibility for changes to Russia's election laws, seemingly in response to the flood of complaints of major violations after parliamentary elections last month.

But in doing so, he appeared to warn those who would challenge the government not to go too far.

"The strengthening of democracy does not mean the weakening of law and order," Mr. Medvedev said. "Any attempts to shatter the situation, destabilize the government, and split society under democratic mottos will be prevented."

#18

Thoroughly Modern Medvedev

By Liam Denning

Wall Street Journal, November 13, 2009

Russian President Dimitry Medvedev's call to modernize his oil-addicted economy carries on a grand tradition stretching back to Czar Peter the Great. But in targeting inefficient state-owned corporations, he also is attacking the centralization of economic power under his predecessor and current prime minister, Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Putin has presumably signed off on this, perhaps recognizing his own reorganization of the economy, while politically useful, left it shockingly vulnerable during the financial crisis. Meanwhile, the prosecutor general has opened 22 criminal cases after inspections of Russia state corporations. Peter Zeihan, of consultancy Stratfor, takes this as a sign that Mr. Medvedev means business: "The difficult political bit has already been launched."

Crucial to realizing Mr. Medvedev's vision is attracting foreign investment. Russian firms' borrowing binge before the economic crisis is why so many have now ended up in the government's grip.

Near-term progress, therefore, looks more dependent on Washington, D.C., than Moscow. U.S. monetary policy is pushing investor dollars back toward hard and high-risk assets like oil and Russian securities. After collapsing to almost nothing, Russian corporate borrowing has jumped along with stock markets worldwide.

The need to persuade once-burned foreign companies that Russia is becoming friendlier might explain the pointed lack of belligerent foreign-policy rhetoric in Mr. Medvedev's speech. A bigger test will be if coming legislation governing access to Russia's natural resources genuinely accommodates foreign companies.

One certainty is that the risk of political instability is rising. The Kremlin has spent a decade entrenching one set of allies at the commanding heights of the economy. Dislodging them in the interests of the greater good likely will prove challenging.

#19

Putin Named World's 3rd Most Powerful Person

By Maria Antonova

Moscow Times, November 13, 2009

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is the world's third-most powerful person, far ahead of President Dmitry Medvedev and outranked only by the U.S. and Chinese presidents, according to a list released by Forbes magazine Thursday.

Medvedev, who was basking in the spotlight of his state-of-the-nation address Thursday, was ranked in 43rd place, a spot lower than the only other Russian politician on the list, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin at No. 42.

The list of 67 people — "one for every 100 million people on the planet" — is topped by U.S. President Barack Obama, who won "by a wide margin," said Forbes, which compiled the ranking for the first time this year.

Power is measured by four criteria: the number of people whom the person exerts power over; the financial resources that the person controls, with a country's gross domestic product used for heads of state; the number of spheres in which the person is influential; and the extent to which the person exercises his power.

Putin scored points in the latter criteria because, unlike IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad, he "likes to throw his weight around by jailing oligarchs, invading neighboring countries and periodically cutting off Western Europe's supply of natural gas," Forbes said in an article accompanying the power list.

The magazine refers to Putin as "anti-Obama" for his dislike of change and "tsar, emperor and autocrat of all the Russians" — a sharp contrast to Medvedev, who is described as Putin's "hand-picked, doe-eyed successor" who is facing an uphill battle after he "went Jerry Maguire" with recent liberal pronouncements. Forbes said Sechin outranked Medvedev because he is the "Kremlin oil man," pushing natural resource deals on various continents.

The only other Russian on the list is Google co-founder Sergey Brin, ranked with his U.S. partner in fifth place.

Maxim Kashulinsky, editor of Forbes Russia and a collaborator on the new list, said preparation took several months and the timing of the publication on the same day as Medvedev's speech was a mere coincidence.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov brushed off the idea that the government should be worried that Medvedev is perceived as being less influential than even Putin's deputy Sechin.

"What is perceived is less important than what is reality, and the reality was shown in today's address," Peskov said, describing Medvedev's speech as "a good, strong, conceptual address."

Peskov also confirmed that Putin was planning to hold his customary, live call-in show later this month, for the eighth time in total and second time as prime minister. But Putin's talk will "certainly not" overshadow the impression left by Medvedev's address, Peskov said.

Putin and Medvedev have said they work in tandem. Many Russians, however, believe that Putin holds the reins, according to several recent opinion polls. A survey by the independent Levada Center in September found that only 13 percent of Russians believe that Medvedev holds power, while 32 percent said power was in Putin's hands and 48 percent said power was divided equally between the two.

Forbes is not the first Western magazine to note Putin's power. While he was still president in 2007, Putin was named Time magazine's person of the year in a feature article titled "A Tsar is Born."

#20

The Editor Of 'Forbes Russia' Picks The Seven Most Powerful People In Russia Forbes.com, November 11, 2009

In Russia the question of who is more powerful is not a theoretical one. One has to know where to find friends and whom not to irritate. Who will protect you from corrupt FSB (former KGB) officers threatening to take your business? Will the governor take your side if you enter a new market dominated by a member of Parliament? Even at the very top, the hierarchy is tangled, leaving only one point crystal clear--Prime Minister Vladimir Putin still is ultimately in charge.

No. 1: Vladimir Putin Prime Minister, Russia Thirty-two percent of Russians believe that the real power in the country belongs to the prime minister, while only 9% give it to President Medvedev and 51% say the power is split equally between the two.

No. 2: Igor Sechin Deputy Prime Minister, Russia Putin's deputy presides over two of the most important sectors of the Russian economy: industry and energy. He heads the board of the state-run oil company Rosneft. Fluent in Portuguese and Spanish, Sechin is the architect of Russia's new friendship with Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

No. 3: Dmitry Medvedev President, Russia Vladimir Putin's hand-picked president is now shaping his own policy, focusing on economic modernization and fighting corruption.

No. 4: Alexei Kudrin Minister of Finance, Russia The informal head of the government's "liberal wing" has been running the Russian Ministry of Finance since 2000. Kudrin was the chief proponent of saving money in Russia's Stabilization Fund, which was a great help during the financial crisis.

No. 5: Vagit Alekperov President, Lukoil It is hard to compare a businessman's power with that of Russian state officials, but the head of Lukoil, Russia's largest private oil company, has effectively survived where many oligarchs have not, by staying away from political games and continuing to invest in his core business.

No. 6: Oleg Deripaska CEO, Basic Element Co. Just a few months ago this aluminum tycoon seemed squashed by debts which topped \$20 billion. But he successfully negotiated payment extensions with bankers and convinced the government that his ailing businesses with 200,000 employees was too big to fail.

No. 7: Patriarch Kirill I Head, Russian Orthodox Church Since he took over as head of the Russian Orthodox Church in January, Kirill has become a major force in politics. A prominent commentator recently called him an example "of the soft, non-state power that Moscow has long been criticized for lacking."

Maxim Kashulinsky is the editor of Forbes Russia.

#21

UK Congregation Strengthens Relationship with Belarus Community WUPJ News, November 12, 2009

Last week, the World Union led a unique workshop at the Union for Reform Judaism biennial in Toronto called "The Rich Rewards of Congregational Twinning." The emphasis was on relationships between North American congregations and Progressive communities worldwide, and it emphasized the successful model of twinning programs with Progressive congregations in the former Soviet Union.

One example of a successful twinning relationship is that between Britain's Radlett & Bushey Reform Synagogue and Congregation Menorah, the Progressive community in Grodno, Belarus. The relationship, which dates back to 1997, has included fundraising, the provision of Judaica items, trips to the UK by Menorah's bar and bat mitzvah-age children, and trips to Grodno by members of RBRS. There have also been specific fundraising drives, for example to enable a young congregant to have much-needed eye surgery, and support for Iryna Belskaia to undergo training at London's Leo Baeck College that prepared her to become director of Jewish education for the Belarus Progressive movement.

The most recent children's visit to the UK took place last June. These visits, says Paul Janes, an RBRS congregant who oversees the twinning relationship, "are designed to reinforce their Jewish knowledge and heritage by immersing them in a successful, active Jewish society... During the visits, the children also have dental treatment as necessary, and sight checks with spectacles provided, if appropriate." There is also the usual touring.

The June visit, though was unique.

"Previously, when [the] children... celebrated their bnei mitzva, they read from transliterations," Janes says. "But this was going to be different. With two rabbis (Grisha Abramovich - the only Progressive rabbi in Belarus, and Tanya Sahknovich, also from Belarus, but now taking up a position with a congregation in Nottingham) ably assisted by a team of helpers from [RBRS], the children learned to read from the Torah."

The results were felt as soon as the youngsters returned to Belarus and attended a summer camp sponsored by Netzer Olami, the World Union's international Zionist youth movement (see WUPJnews #367). In an e-mail to Janes after the camp, Abramovich wrote: "I have been working for 16 years in the Netzer movement in the FSU and I don't remember Belarusian children from relatively small cities... that were able to read from the Torah scroll."

Last month a delegation from RBRS traveled to Grodno and the outlying congregation in Lida to attend the youngsters' b'nei and b'not mitzva celebrations.

"We started the service by presenting a tallit to each of the children," says Janes. "It was great to hear their Hebrew, knowing how much they had gained from their visit to us in the summer. David Mitchell, an RBRS associate rabbi, blessed each of the children with our very own misheberach, and then gave them a certificate and a gift from our [religious school]. A significant step forward for the community was their new ark, which was being used for only the second time and had been built with our sponsorship [see WUPJnews #287 - ed]. Also new was the Torah scroll. With this scroll and with the training they were given during their visit [to the UK], the Grodno kids achieved a community first - b'nei and b'not mitzva reading directly from a scroll."

The RBRS contingent attended a second ceremony for an additional five b'nei and b'not mitzvah celebrants from Grodno, again, with Rabbi Abramovich officiating and Rabbi Mitchell providing the blessings and gifts. And then it was on to Lida, about 60 miles away, for the first bar/bat mitzvah there since 1941.

"On entering the packed hall, the excitement was palpable," says Janes. "The girls were dressed up to the nines. The deputy mayor kicked things off with a speech. Then Rabbi Grisha put on his bowler hat again, and after Rabbi David had called for a reflective silence we all said the Shehecheyanu prayer, the blessing of thankfulness for having reached an important occasion."

"We went through what by now was a 'tradition': tallitot, blessings, etc.," Janes continues. "All the children again read beautifully from the Torah. They followed up with speeches, some in English, some in Russian, but all with great thanks and gratitude to RBRS and to everyone involved in every way. For those of us who had hosted these kids, it was a very emotional moment."

For the full report on the trip on the RBRS Web site, click [here](#).

#22

Forging a European Worldview

By Aleksander Kwasniewski

Moscow Times, November 13, 2009

Some complain that the European Union lacks a “worldview.” In fact, the EU’s problem is that it has too many of them.

Europeans’ common experiences and interests mean that they should have a shared view on global issues. But the sad reality is that political, social and economic pressures tend to push EU members and citizens in opposing directions. Shared histories, it seems, are an insufficient basis for shared policies.

Nevertheless, the more pragmatic that Europe’s policies are, the greater the chances of success, not least when it comes to global issues. Europeans have a shared appraisal of many of the world’s problems and often put forward common methods and strategies for coping with them.

For example, on climate change, immigration and development aid, there is growing consensus, as there is on energy policy and the further development of the European Security Strategy. Agreement in these areas is not merely a reflection of some lowest common denominators. In each area, Europe has contributed important added value at a global level.

Indeed, Europe’s community of attitudes is becoming synonymous with solutions to world problems. After all, climate change, energy security and demographic challenges have been part of the European discourse for many years. Now that discourse is starting to be shared by other parts of the world.

The global financial and economic crisis may also be a catalyst for promoting Europe’s vision of a new world order. The EU vision of a capitalist economy harnessed to social progress and subject to regulation, rather than *laissez-faire*, is growing in influence. New economic powers like China, India and Brazil must find their own ways of addressing social injustice and encouraging equal opportunity for all, and the European model looks increasingly attractive to them.

Yet many differences still separate societies within the EU. There are divergent views on many vital global problems. And although these differences may grow smaller with time, they occasionally take on an alarmingly clear-cut form, as in the case of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

It is nevertheless comforting that Europe’s differences on global issues have not had an excessive impact on the EU’s internal dynamics. The war in Iraq did not delay the Union’s “big bang” enlargement and was not the reason for the failure of referenda in France and the Netherlands on the Constitutional and Lisbon treaties.

And Europe does need to develop structures and decision-making processes that limit conflicts of interest by offering compromise solutions. This is the crux of the Lisbon Treaty, which is designed to usher in new institutions and mechanisms aimed at creating more politically cohesive EU external policies. Transferring more areas of responsibility, such as foreign aid and development policies, to EU institutions helps the Union to adapt to new international realities by underpinning its growing importance as Europe’s decision-making center.

Shaping a shared vision of the world should start with Europe’s immediate neighborhood. The enlargement of NATO and the EU has embraced a dozen or so states in Central and Eastern Europe and in the western Balkans. But despite these achievements, European integration is far from complete, and it will remain so until all European countries can follow the same development path.

This failing was the key reason for the Balkan tragedy of the 1990s. Fortunately, the time for armed conflict in that region appears to have come to a definitive end now that the Balkan states are on the path to NATO and EU membership. But Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine and Moldova, also must be treated as a region of special importance.

Ukraine’s population of 46 million means that it is far too big and important to be left out of any vision of Europe’s future. Yet the EU’s strategy toward Ukraine has been ambiguous and obscure. The Orange Revolution’s reform drive has been slowed or even halted not only by domestic political and economic crises, but also by the EU’s perceived indifference to Ukraine’s fate.

EU leaders lament Ukraine's political divisions and slow pace of reform, and the country's leaders need to address these criticisms. But lack of progress also reflects the EU's failure to embrace Ukraine. Reform of a country's political and economic institutions and its accession to the EU and NATO usually go hand in hand because the prospect of membership makes painful decisions electorally acceptable. In short, it is unrealistic of the EU to expect European outcomes from countries like Ukraine and Moldova without making a full commitment to them.

Fortunately, that approach is changing. The Gas Memorandum signed earlier this year between the EU and Ukraine on the extension and exploitation of Ukrainian gas pipelines is a perfect example; in return for political support and for funding of the extension of its pipelines, Ukraine has agreed to adopt EU rules governing management and access to the gas transmission line. Ukraine also agreed to implement the relevant EU energy directives as part of its membership of the European Energy Community. It is a first step toward Ukraine's eventual full integration into the EU single market.

The EU's current lack of unanimity on many world issues, as well as continental issues such as Ukraine, is no reason for despair. The trick for the Union is to develop shared solutions and to take joint foreign policy actions, even when various EU governments see things differently.

Aleksander Kwasniewski was president of Poland from 1995 to 2005.

#23

Russia urges EU to help prevent gas interruptions via Ukraine RIA Novosti, November 13, 2009

MOSCOW - Russia has called on the European Union to take measures, including financial, to prevent problems arising in Russian natural gas transit via Ukraine to Europe, Moscow's EU envoy said on Friday.

"We are unhappy to report that the [January 17 presidential] election campaign is interfering in this issue in Ukraine... and that energy issues, energy supplies to Ukraine itself as well as transit now feature on the election agenda," Vladimir Chizhov told a Moscow-Brussels video linkup.

"Under these circumstances, we urge the European Union to take an active role in a range of preventive measures, including financial support, to ensure the uninterrupted transit of hydrocarbons via Ukraine," he said.

Chizhov said the issue would be discussed at an EU-Russia summit to be held in Stockholm on November 18.

Ukraine earlier reported 25 billion cubic meters of gas in its storage facilities, which it says would be enough for the uninterrupted gas transit to Europe this winter.

"I assume this time Ukraine is better prepared for the coming winter," Chizhov said.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko pledged on Wednesday that Kiev would honor its commitments to supply Russian gas to Europe.

"We are taking extraordinary efforts to pay for natural gas, including for November, on time, without delay and in full," Tymoshenko said, adding that this was the result of effective cooperation between the IMF and Ukraine.

Her deputy, Hryhoriy Nemyrya, warned on Tuesday that Ukraine may face difficulties in paying for Russian natural gas in January if a "pause" in contacts with the IMF persists.

A bitter gas pricing and debt dispute between Moscow and Kiev at the start of the year led to a brief cutoff in supplies to Ukraine and transits to Europe, leaving millions of Europeans without gas in January. Ukraine transits around 80% of Russian gas bound for Europe.

#24

Ukraine's Presidential Hopefuls Lay Out Their Programs

By Taras Kuzio

RFE/RL, November 13, 2009

The deadline to register candidates for Ukraine's presidential election was November 9, after which the seven candidates who were refused registration were given two additional days to resubmit their applications. On November 13, the Central Election Commission will confirm the final list of candidates for the January 17, 2010, presidential vote.

The main reason some candidates were denied registration was their failure to prove they had provided the mandatory \$300,000 deposit, which candidates that fail to make it to the second round of voting will forfeit. Although the deposit is large, political forces might have good reason to back the registration of so-called technical candidates. First, they mean additional representatives on the election boards that count the votes and, second, they could emerge as a potential ally in the second round.

In 1999, 13 candidates vied for the post, while in 2004, there were 24. This time around, 18 people will attempt to become the next president of Ukraine. Those 18 candidates can be divided into three groups. First, there are the two leading contenders -- Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Party of Regions head Viktor Yanukovich, each of whom are polling about 20-30 percent support.

The second-tier candidates include incumbent President Viktor Yushchenko, former Foreign Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, former Ukrainian Central Bank head Serhiy Tihopko, and parliament speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn. Support for these candidates is in the 3-8 percent range.

The rest can be considered technical or spoiler candidates, including former Defense Minister Anatolii Hrytsenko, nationalist Svoboda party leader Oleh Tyahnybok, Free Democrats party leader Mykhaylo Brodsky, and eight others who have the backing of no more than 1 percent of the electorate.

Setting Out Programs

It's interesting to take a look at the domestic- and foreign-policy programs of the first- and second-tier candidates. The platforms reveal many similarities, particularly in the realm of populist social initiatives. The programs of four of the candidates bear distinct hallmarks of Soviet nostalgia.

With an eye on the former Communist Party supporters that have defected to the Party of Regions over the last five years, Yanukovich has adopted rhetoric about economic growth and political stability that echoes what one hears in Russia these days.

Yatsenyuk's campaign, which has been widely criticized for adopting a military-camouflage color scheme, is dominated by Soviet-style slogans such as "New Industrialization" and "A Healthy And Educated People." Lytvyn's program also looks backward with an eye toward gaining the support of former Socialist Party (SPU) voters in the small towns and rural areas of central Ukraine. SPU leader Oleksandr Moroz discredited himself and his party when he defected from the Orange coalition in July 2006.

Former Central Bank head Tihopko, who is also a successful private banker from Dnipropetrovsk, is predictably emphasizing the central role of economic policy, thereby echoing the 1994 campaign of former President Leonid Kuchma. Tihopko's slogans include, somewhat strangely, "The Economy Above All Else" and "Ukraine's Interests Above All Else." Yanukovich likewise emphasizes "A Strong Economy -- A Strong Country."

The eastern Ukraine candidates -- including Tihopko and Yanukovich -- place less emphasis on democracy, the rule of law, and corruption. In fact, Yanukovich's program does not even mention corruption.

Popular Populist Measures

Traditionally, Ukrainian presidential candidates promise to battle corruption energetically, but once in office they do little to realize this pledge. Combating corruption requires political will that exists in Georgia, but not in Ukraine.

The German think tank Transparency International has reported that Ukraine made some progress against corruption in 2005 and 2006, but since 2007 has fallen back to the dismal ratings of the Kuchma era. In contrast,

Georgia has improved its rating each year since 2004. In the 2008 ranking, Ukraine came in at 134th, while Georgia had risen to 67th.

In 2004, Yushchenko promised "to send the bandits to jail," but five years later Ukraine's elites remain above the law and Ukrainian "bandits" have gone to jail in the United States and Germany, but not in Ukraine. This time around, only Tymoshenko's program explicitly condemns the capture of the Ukrainian state by oligarchs.

Populism is a traditional hallmark of Ukrainian presidential elections. In 2004, Yushchenko offered his "10 Steps" program that included many social populist initiatives. The Party of Regions recently introduced legislation in parliament to increase social payments, repeating a tactic then-Prime Minister Yanukovich used in 2004 when he doubled pensions. That initiative was backed by all parliamentary factions except Tymoshenko's and was signed into law by Yushchenko.

The measure casts doubt on whether the International Monetary Fund will disburse the fourth tranche of a stand-by agreement loan before the election, opening up the real possibility of default. Nonetheless, Yanukovich's current program cynically declares the 2010 election is an opportunity to "clean out the populists and political adventurers from the Ukrainian government."

Of the seven main candidates, only Yanukovich and Tymoshenko prioritize national and religious matters. As in 2004, Yanukovich supports elevating Russian to the status of a second state language, a step also supported by Symonenko, Tihipko, and, possibly, Lytvyn. As in 2004, the second round will most likely again give voters two positions on the state language: Ukrainian (Tymoshenko) versus Ukrainian-Russian (Yanukovich).

Foreign Policy

In the foreign-policy domain, none of the candidates mentions NATO in any form, a pattern that repeats earlier elections (Yushchenko and Our Ukraine have never included NATO membership in their election programs). Of the seven main candidates, only Tymoshenko and Yushchenko support EU membership. Symonenko and Yatsenyuk oppose it, and the other three are ambivalent.

Yanukovich and Symonenko support Ukraine's full membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States' Single Economic Space (SES). Countries cannot be in two customs unions at the same time and therefore joining the SES is impossible if Ukraine signs a free-trade agreement with the EU next year, an important nuance that will be missed by the average Yanukovich supporter.

Yatsenyuk's proposed Eastern European union of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan with Kyiv as its capital is surprisingly similar to the SES. Yatsenyuk's program calls for joint programs by these eight countries in the fields of energy, transportation and communications, industrial production and exports, science and technology, and the military-industrial complex.