

WASHINGTON, D.C. December 4, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: Celebrating 20 Years of Russia's Jewish Community; NCSJ's Board of Governors Meets Tuesday

Dear Friend,

Having traveled to Moscow twice in the last month, I thought I would share some brief impressions with you. The overall mood in the city is much improved from an earlier visit this year. This can be directly tied to the improved economy, which continues to depend on the prices of commodities, primarily oil and gas.

I arrived in Moscow a few days after the unfortunate terrorist attack against a luxury train headed to Saint Petersburg. Many were killed, including, several senior government officials, and even more were wounded and hospitalized. Two groups have claimed responsibility for the tragic attack, one ultra-nationalist, and the other Chechen. The government has promised that those responsible will be swiftly brought to justice. After the initial shock, ridership returned to normal levels on this train route.

I was in Moscow to participate in a number of significant events for the Russian Jewish community. First, my friend and colleague Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt was celebrating his 20th anniversary in Moscow. Pinchas and his wife Dara have made a tremendous contribution to the growth and development of Jewish life in Moscow and the rest of Russia. It was also the 20th anniversary of the founding of the VAAD, the first independent Jewish organization to be created under the Soviet government. I joined many old and dear friends at a superb conference looking at the future of Jewish life in Russia. It was my privilege to participate in a panel discussing the current trends impacting Jews in the former Soviet Union. There was a festive evening program saluting the founders of the VAAD, hosted by Alexander Machkevitch, the President and Founder of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

As if this wasn't enough, the Conference of European Rabbis was also in Moscow holding its Board Meeting. I joined in several meetings, including one with Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Finally, Ambassador Ronald Lauder was honored at the Choral Synagogue by the Gedolah Toras Chaim Yeshiva for his support of this remarkable institution.

One disconcerting note from this latest visit is the perceptible change in the attitude of many Russians toward the United States. While most of Europe celebrated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall last month, it was almost a non-event or worse in Russia. I have heard far more criticism of U.S foreign policy than ever before.

On an interesting cultural note, everywhere I went Muscovites were complaining about the lack of cold temperatures and snow. Unlike in Washington, D.C., where the first hint of snow causes panic, it's just not truly winter in Moscow if the ground is not covered with a fresh layer of snow.

Washington and Moscow will be on the agenda at NCSJ's Board of Governors meeting next week, where we will cover a number of interesting issues affecting U.S.-Russian relations, as well as the rest of the region. It is almost one year after the "reset" of relations by the Obama Administration and the Board will hear from Howard Solomon, Director for Russian Affairs for the National Security Council, and David Kramer, Senior

Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund. In addition, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the United States, Erlan Idirissov will speak about his country's upcoming role as the next Chair-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. It's not too late to join us for this most informative meeting; please register at ncsj.org/AuxPages/120809BOG_notice.shtml#RSVP.

Sincerely,

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

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. December 4, 2009

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#1a

PACE: there is more freedom but more cynicism in Ukraine **Interfax-Ukraine, November 26, 2009**

A Council of Europe delegation on Nov. 26 credited current preparations for Ukraine's presidential election on January 17, 2010, with being generally marked by an atmosphere of freedom and competition but complained that the electorate was showing growing cynicism and diminishing confidence in politicians.

The delegation, which represented the Council's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and visited Ukraine with a pre-electoral mission, said in a press release that there is more media freedom in the country today but that media are heavily dependent on financing and on Ukraine's business community.

The PACE team questioned what it said had been assurances by Ukraine's Central Election Commission that voters' lists were ready.

The delegation also complained that there exists a strong connection between political and financial interests in Ukraine and that political struggles are much too often seen in the country as clashes between personalities, ambitions and financial interests rather than contests of political platforms and ideas.

The delegation expressed anxiety at alleged anti-Semitic allusions and hate rhetoric used by some of the candidates.

#1b

At Least 25 Killed as a Train Derails in Western Russia AP, November 28, 2009

MOSCOW— An express train carrying hundreds of passengers from Moscow to St. Petersburg derailed late Friday, killing at least 25 people and injuring dozens of others, emergency officials said.

Russian Railways, the state-run railroad company, said that the cause of the derailment was not yet determined but that one possibility was sabotage. Russian news agencies cited unidentified officials as saying a small crater had been found at the site of the wreck, leading to speculation that it could have been caused by explosives.

The three rear cars of the Nevsky Express went off the tracks in Tver Province, northwest of Moscow, the Emergency Situations Ministry said. Russian Railways said that four cars had derailed and that 50 people were taken to two hospitals in the area.

The emergencies ministry said 25 people had been killed and 87 injured, citing preliminary information. A bomb blast on the same line in 2007 derailed a passenger train, injuring 27 people. Two suspects have been arrested in connection with the explosion and the authorities are searching for a former military officer they think planned the bombing, but the motive for the attack has been unclear. An explosion in a bathroom on a Moscow to St. Petersburg train in 1997 killed five people.

#1c

World Russian Congress Kicks Off In Moscow RFE/RL, December 1, 2009

MOSCOW -- About 1,000 delegates from 90 countries gathered today in Moscow for the third World Congress of Russian Compatriots, or Russians living abroad, RFE/RL's Russian Service reports.

President Dmitry Medvedev said at the congress that laws for Russians living abroad will be amended soon to improve the support they receive.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin addressed the congress delegates and stressed that "support to the [Russian] compatriots living abroad is one of the priorities of Russia's state policy."

The Russian media reported that the Russian diaspora is the second largest in the world after the Chinese, with some 30 million Russians living abroad, most of them in former Soviet republics.

Independent Uzbek media reported that the delegation from Uzbekistan, which is headed by the chair of the Russian Cultural Center in Uzbekistan, will not participate in the congress for the first time.

The Uzbek Foreign Ministry reportedly said that it "highly recommended [that the delegation] not participate in the congress."

The Russian daily "Vremya Novostei" reported that an Uzbek delegation would take part in the congress, but it would be represented by the deputy chairman of the Russian Cultural Center, Sergei Mironov, and officials from the Uzbek Embassy in Moscow.

The Russian Foreign Ministry refused to give RFE/RL accreditation for the event.

#1d

Medvedev sees dwindling anti-Semitism in Russia

JTA, December 1, 2009

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told a delegation of Jewish leaders that anti-Semitism in the country "is becoming much less prevalent."

Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with a chief rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar, and the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, Alexander Boroda, as well as representatives of the European Jewish Congress, on Nov. 26, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS and Baltic Countries.

In discussing anti-Semitism, Medvedev said, "I would certainly not go so far as to say that the situation is ideal, but it has become known that anti-Semitism will simply not be tolerated in the political environment. No sane politician today would make any statements incriminating him in this manner."

Medvedev praised the Jewish community's activities in Russia and expressed his support for the Jewish community's plan to build a Russian Jewish Museum of Tolerance in Moscow.

Medvedev also instructed his administration to look into Lazar's proposal to recognize the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Jan. 27, as a national holiday.

#1e

Ukrainian professor: Israel harvests children's organs

JTA, December 3, 2009

A Ukrainian philosophy professor said that Israel has brought thousands of Ukrainian children into the country to harvest their organs.

Vyacheslav Gudin told about 300 attendees at a conference in Kiev on Nov. 29 that Israeli medical centers have used the children for "spare parts" in the past two years, Ha'aretz reported Thursday.

The claim, which has been picked up by several Ukrainian Web sites, comes several months after a Swedish newspaper article claimed that Israel's army killed Palestinians for their organs.

During the conference, two professors presented a book blaming "the Zionists" for the Ukrainian famine of the 1930s, according to Ha'aretz.

The spread of the organ harvesting claim comes during a contentious Ukrainian presidential election campaign in which anti-Semitism has played a major role. Presidential candidate Sergey Ratushnyak has made anti-Semitic and xenophobic statements during the campaign.

#2

Lavrov: IDF soldier's captivity 'intolerable'

By Haviv Rettig Gur

Jerusalem Post, November 25, 2009

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called Gilad Schalit's continued captivity "intolerable," and said it was "a humanitarian issue" of great importance, according to European Jewish leaders who met with Lavrov on Tuesday in Moscow.

Lavrov met with leaders of the European Jewish Congress as part of a series of encounters between the group and Russian leaders this week that will culminate in a Thursday session with both Lavrov and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

The group is using the meetings to lobby Russia's top decision-makers about Russia's stance regarding Iran, among other issues.

Lavrov made the remarks about Schalit after EJC President Moshe Kantor handed the foreign minister a copy of a children's book created from a story Gilad Schalit wrote when he was 11 years old, titled *When the Shark and the Fish First Met*.

The Jewish leaders asked Lavrov to wield Russian influence in the Middle East "to help solve this issue."

According to the EJC, Lavrov said he was in constant communication with the Schalit family and that the Russian government stood ready to provide assistance at any time.

The EJC delegation also explained its concerns over Russian opposition to increased sanctions on Iran.

"It is vital that there is consensus on the next step should the talks [between Western powers and Iran] fail," Kantor said after the meeting with Lavrov.

"Russia is a vital part of any chance that a strong sanctions program will achieve its object and end the nuclear standoff peacefully," he added.

"We also asked the Russian leaders to impress the need for tough sanctions [on] their allies, including the Chinese," he said.

The delegation also raised with Lavrov - and will discuss with Medvedev - the possibility that Russia will give the Iranians Russian-made S-300 surface-to-air missile systems.

If the state-of-the-art S-300s reach Iran, Kantor said, "we can kiss good-bye to any chance of a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

"It is clear that the Iranians already see themselves as able to dictate terms to the international community. This missile system would allow them to think of themselves as completely above the law and would act with complete impunity."

#3
Russia Admits Lapses in Case of Sick Lawyer
By Ellen Barry
New York Times, November 27, 2009

MOSCOW — A top Russian prison official on Thursday acknowledged wrongdoing in the case of Sergei L. Magnitsky, a 37-year-old lawyer whose death in pretrial detention last week has provoked a groundswell of anger.

"We are not trying to diminish our guilt in this case — it obviously exists," said the official, Aleksandr Smirnov, assistant director of the Federal Prison Service, in testimony to the Public Chamber, a Kremlin advisory panel.

It was the first acknowledgment of responsibility from Russian authorities since Mr. Magnitsky died on Nov. 16, officially of toxic shock and heart failure, and it came two days after President Dmitri A. Medvedev called for a high-level investigation into his death.

Mr. Smirnov said that Mr. Magnitsky was held in “very respectable” conditions for the first eight months of his incarceration. “Then he was transferred to another detention center,” he said, according to the RIA-Novosti news service.

Mr. Magnitsky’s situation deteriorated when he was moved to Butyrskaya Prison, where he remained for four months until his death.

“There, there were clear violations on our side,” Mr. Smirnov said. “I will not deny them, but I would not like to draw any conclusions yet.” He added that the prison service would release the results of an internal inquiry early next week.

A spokeswoman for Russia’s Interior Ministry, Irina Dudukina, has repeatedly claimed that Mr. Magnitsky never complained about medical care and that his death was “totally unexpected.”

Mr. Magnitsky’s employers have distributed notes he took while in custody, in which he said that a prison doctor had given him a diagnosis of pancreatitis and gallbladder disease, but that after his transfer to Butyrskaya his requests for medical care were ignored and a planned surgery was canceled.

At the time of his arrest, Mr. Magnitsky was working as outside counsel for Hermitage Capital Management, an international investment fund whose founder, William F. Browder, was involved in a bitter feud with Russian authorities.

Mr. Browder, who has not been allowed into Russia since 2005, has accused Russian officials of using his companies to embezzle \$230 million from the Russian Treasury. Russian officials then accused Mr. Browder of evading \$17.5 million in taxes. Mr. Magnitsky, the head of the tax department at the law firm Firestone Duncan, was a defendant in that case.

Ms. Dudukina, of the Interior Ministry, has said that Mr. Magnitsky was detained pending his trial because he was a flight risk, based on a purchase of passport-size photographs, and because if he had been free he would have intimidated witnesses in the case.

#4

Elderly Soviet refuseniks trying to survive

By Yael Branovsky

Ynetnews, November 27, 2009

Twenty years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the immigration of about one million Jews to Israel, in a wave of aliyah which was characterized by the relatively young age of the immigrants (71% were under the age of 50) and the large number of university graduates (70% of all immigrants).

But even before the iron curtain's gates were opened, hundreds of Jews fought for immigration across the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and only managed to make aliyah at an adult age due to Moscow's ongoing refusal to let them leave.

This is why those 400 immigrants, many of whom are more than 70 years old, have not managed to save enough money for retirement and are now living in extreme poverty conditions with tiny allowances from the Nations Insurance Institute.

The elderly aliyah refuseniks have recently decided to launch a battle, demanding that the years the Soviet authorities refused to let them immigrate to Israel, during which they continued to fight for the Jewish state, be added to the calculation of their pension funds.

Vladimir Prestin, 75, was an aliyah refusenik for 20 years due to his work at a secret plant. He asked to immigrate in 1970, when he was 36. The Soviet government refused to let him leave, but he continued to work for the State of Israel for many years, organizing seminars on Jewish culture and publishing a magazine on the State of Israel and Judaism.

"We, the aliyah refuseniks, were just like Jewish Agency activists today," he says, adding that "because of my work I was not allowed to leave the Soviet Union, but I always did things for Israel."

Prestin eventually arrived in Israel in early 1989, and began working as a respiration machines technician at a hospital.

"I worked for nine years and was fired at the age of 65. I receive a pension of NIS 1,600 (about \$425) a month, and the National Insurance Institute pays a similar sum. My wife has died and I am paying a mortgage on my own, which doesn't leave me much for living," he says. "If I could, I would take another job, but I'm too old. It's very difficult living off this sum. I have always done things for Israel and I would like to live here in dignity."

Aharon Gurevitch is leading the battle on behalf of the other aliyah refuseniks. He appealed to immigrate to Israel when he was 35, but arrived in the country only 15 years later. "Most aliyah refuseniks were also 'employment refuseniks' – because in order to file documents asking to make aliyah, we had to quit our jobs," he explains.

Gurevitch adds that all those year, the aliyah refuseniks did not have a regular income and made a living from giving private lessons, while living frugally.

"When we arrived here, most of us were already more than 50 years old and could not really get a job in our profession, so we went to work as cleaners, construction workers and similar types of jobs. Nonetheless, none of us managed to accumulate sufficient seniority for a pension plan, and we are now living off pennies, in poverty," he explains.

Gurevitch finds it difficult to talk about his economic distress. "It's very problematic for me to even buy a book for my grandson, and sitting in a cafe is basically a dream. I haven't traveled abroad, and I don't even have money to tour Israel," he says painfully.

According to Gurevitch, he and his friends – who have worked so hard and made so many sacrifices for Israel – have simply been forgotten by the State. "We fought to have the gates of the Soviet Union opened, and thanks to that a million immigrants arrived in Israel. We are not asking for much, we just want our seniority years to be calculated so that we can live in dignity."

He says that many elderly aliyah refuseniks are living in poverty, but are too proud to demand a pension from Russia, especially considering their desperation in regards to the chances of receiving any aid from the State of Israel.

"People who have passed the age of 70 are delivering newspapers and taking care of small children and babies in order to make a few pennies. None of us have any savings, inheritance or assets. We are old and we need help now. Every politician or public servant we turn to just nods in agreement and expresses solidarity, but no one actually helps us," he says.

'Unbelievable ungratefulness'

Marik Shtern, the son of late Knesset Member Yuri Shtern, has decided to join and help the elderly aliyah refuseniks in their battle.

"This is a case of unbelievable ungratefulness on the part of the State of Israel. These are Zionist activists who risked their lives for many years in order to have Jews immigrate to the country and spread the

Jewish culture in the Soviet Union," he says. "My parents become Zionists in Moscow in the 1970s, and eventually immigrated to Israel thanks to the efforts of these Jewish activists.

"Only thinking about the fact that many of them are living off a tiny sum of NIS 1,500 a month shocks and angers me," he adds. "These days, when the contribution of the Russian aliyah is being questioned, there is an important need to emphasize the glorious past of the aliyah refuseniks, and first and foremost solve their disgraceful economic situation. The Israeli government must come up with a quick solution for this distress."

Knesset Member Lia Shemtov (Yisrael Beiteinu), chairwoman of the Knesset's Immigrant Absorption Committee plans to discuss the situation of the aliyah refuseniks during next week's session. Information Minister Yuli Edelstein, an aliyah refusenik himself and a prisoner of Zion – told Ynet that he would work for the elderly immigrants and has already appealed to the relevant ministries in a bid to solve the problem.

"This is a relatively small group we are talking about," he said. "I promise to help and to try and pass a private bill, which will regulate the matter, and get the government to support it."

#5

Knesset panel considers gov't pensions for needy refuseniks

By Haviv Rettig Gur

Jerusalem Post, December 2, 2009

The Knesset Absorption Committee on Tuesday called on the government to establish a professional committee to examine the welfare needs of some 33,000 aging Soviet-era refuseniks.

The refuseniks are former Jewish activists who during the 1960s, '70s and '80s defied the restrictions on Jewish activism in areas under Soviet rule and demanded the right to leave the Soviet Union and move to Israel.

While there is no data available on the economic condition of the refuseniks living in Israel today, many are believed to be living in poverty.

"We're mainly concerned about their pensions," explained Likud MK Ze'ev Elkin.

"Those who were involved in Zionist activities [in the Soviet Union] usually lost their work because of it. When they arrived in Israel as adults who hadn't worked in their professions for many years, they often had trouble finding work here. So we know that this is a group that because of its Zionist activism has not had a chance to earn a pension for their old age," Elkin said.

Several MKs who had immigrated from former Soviet Union (FSU) countries, including Elkin, Kadima MK Marina Solodkin and coalition chairwoman MK Lia Shemtov of Israel Beiteinu, spoke of the debt owed by the Jewish world and Israel to the refuseniks.

"This is a group of activists that lost their jobs because they tried to tell Russian and Soviet Jews to have pride in themselves and that they have a homeland of their own," said Solodkin.

The committee issued a statement on Tuesday calling on the government to establish within two months a professional inter-ministerial committee that would "locate and map out the refusenik population" and would "initiate legislation that will enable this population to live in dignity in their old age."

Elkin, who serves as coalition chairman for the current government, promised to advance a bill together with Shemtov and other committee members "that would recognize the years of anti-Soviet activism for the purposes of some kind of state pension."

According to Nativ, the government aliya agency that once served as the Israeli intelligence arm that kept in touch with the activists behind the Iron Curtain, there are currently some 33,500 refuseniks living in Israel.

"We're talking about a relatively small group of people that can be mapped out using Nativ data," said Elkin.

"These are people who sacrificed their career, endangered their freedom and sometimes their lives, in order to struggle for their right, and the right of others, to make aliya. Partly because of their activism, we succeeded in mobilizing the west and bringing down that regime," he added.

#6
Russia Plays by Its Own Rules in Murder Case
By Alan Cowell
New York Times, November 28, 2009

LONDON — In the somber and sometimes sinister confines of Highgate Cemetery, not far from the grave of Karl Marx, a small cortege wound past the Victorian Gothic tombstones this week in tribute to a more recent arrival among its assembly of the notable dead.

Alexander V. Litvinenko, a onetime K.G.B. officer and foe of the Kremlin, died on Nov. 23, 2006, poisoned by a rare radioactive isotope, polonium 210, administered in a most unlikely weapon of individual destruction — a teapot.

Led by his widow, Marina, a small cluster of friends and associates offered prayers and thoughts at Mr. Litvinenko's grave Monday in memory of the drama that began after he sipped from a toxic brew on Nov. 1, 2006, at a hotel bar in Grosvenor Square in London, just across the way from the American Embassy. Over the next 22 days, polonium's voracious radiation devoured his vital systems from within.

A brief aside: I covered the story of his death in some detail for The New York Times, and later expanded my research into a book.

The anniversary this week recalled the much broader themes evoked by Mr. Litvinenko's death — of justice, impunity and international accountability in modern Russia.

At the time, he and his family had secured British citizenship after fleeing Russia in 2000. He had been an acerbic critic of Russia's then-president, Vladimir V. Putin, partly on his own account and partly on behalf of his longtime sponsor, the wealthy former oligarch Boris A. Berezovsky, who followed him into self-exile.

They were turbulent days. But three years after Mr. Litvinenko's death, the headlines have faded and the case is no closer to a lawful resolution than it ever was.

British prosecutors have identified a suspect — Andrei K. Lugovoi, a business contact and fellow alumnus of the K.G.B. — and have sought his extradition from Russia to face murder charges, a demand that has always seemed to contain a strong element of wishful thinking.

Among some Russians, Mr. Lugovoi has assumed the status of a national celebrity, shielded from legal pursuit by his elevation to a seat in the Russian Parliament. In any event, the Kremlin argues, Russia's Constitution forbids the extradition of its citizens. The reality, thus, remains that a British citizen could be poisoned in broad daylight in central London without judicial redress. The case — once labeled the Polonium Trail — has gone cold. Moscow rules have again been exported to London.

Earlier this month, the British foreign secretary, David Miliband, traveled to Moscow for the first official visit by anyone in his position since Mr. Litvinenko's death. The signal was clear: Britain wants to move past the diplomatic stalemate provoked by the poisoning.

Russian officials understand all too well the politics of muscular power and have calculated from the beginning that Britain will do very little, indeed has no power, to reinforce its demands for extradition. Realpolitik — rooted in Western Europe's hunger for Russia's gas and support in international affairs — will finally trump any official desire to bring Mr. Lugovoi to trial.

German prosecutors, too, have abandoned a three-year inquiry into a stopover in Hamburg by Dmitri V. Kovtun, Mr. Lugovoi's business associate, on his way from Moscow to London in October 2006.

Mr. Kovtun, a former Red Army officer, and Mr. Lugovoi have both acknowledged to interviewers that they were with Mr. Litvinenko on that fateful afternoon of Nov. 1, 2006, in the Pine Bar of the Millennium Mayfair hotel. Both men have insisted on their innocence. Indeed, they have accused Mr. Litvinenko of trying to poison them.

Shortly after Mr. Litvinenko's death, the German authorities said they wanted to find out whether Mr. Kovtun illegally imported radioactive materials into Germany. Traces of polonium were, in fact, found in several places where he tarried — including his ex-wife's apartment — but on Nov. 6, German prosecutors concluded that there was no evidence that he had committed a crime and the inquiry was quietly dropped.

So what, if anything, has changed since Mr. Litvinenko's death?

President Dmitri A. Medvedev, Mr. Putin's handpicked successor, has spoken of strengthening the rule of law and political pluralism, even though some opposition politicians express profound skepticism about such pledges.

There has been no publicly chronicled repetition of the international drama surrounding the Litvinenko case, with all its imagery of cloak-and-dagger Cold War skullduggery.

But there have been many other signs that dissent — among journalists, lawyers and human rights activists — remains a high and lethal risk in Russia.

Shortly before Mr. Litvinenko died, Anna Politkovskaya, a campaigning investigative journalist, was shot to death in her apartment house in Moscow. Three years later, there has been no real progress towards punishing her killer.

As Natalia Alonso of Amnesty International put it, "by failing to prosecute the perpetrators, the climate of fear and intimidation has deepened."

Last January, a crusading lawyer, Stanislav Markelov, and a trainee reporter, Anastasia Baburova, were shot to death in broad daylight on a Moscow street near the Kremlin. Ten months later, two young people identified as ultranationalists were arrested.

In July, Natalya Estemirova, a human rights activist in Chechnya, was forced into a car and found by a roadside hours later, shot to death — one of three murders of human rights workers in the restive North Caucasus in the space of four months. Just this week, Mr. Medvedev ordered an inquiry into the death of Sergei L. Magnitsky, a 37-year-old lawyer who died in pretrial detention in a Moscow prison.

Since 2000, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York, 17 journalists have been murdered in Russia because of their work. Only one of those cases has been solved.

"Let us be perfectly plain," the committee said in a September report. "Any state that turns a blind eye — or worse — towards the assassination of reporters cannot call itself a democracy."

#7

Russian Train Wreck Tied to Terrorist Bomb

By Clifford J. Levy and Ellen Barry

New York Times, November 29, 2009

MOSCOW — The cause of the crash of one of Russia's most illustrious trains was identified on Saturday as a homemade bomb that went off on the tracks between Moscow and St. Petersburg, killing more than 25 people, wounding scores of others and raising fears of a new era of terrorism here.

Officials called the explosion on Friday night the worst terrorist attack in Russia in years, outside volatile Muslim parts of the North Caucasus region, which includes Chechnya. There were no immediate credible claims of responsibility.

The force of the crash crumpled parts of the luxury train, propelling several of its 14 cars off the tracks, trapping passengers in smashed compartments and scattering luggage in the nearby woods.

People on the train described a scene of panic and devastation in a rural area that was difficult for rescuers to reach.

The train, the Nevsky Express, is a preferred means of travel for the Russian elite between the country's two most important cities. Among the dead were a former senator and a senior official in the federal economics ministry.

At the attack site, 200 miles northwest of Moscow, investigators reported Saturday that they had found remnants of a homemade bomb, equivalent to 15 pounds of TNT, that left a crater five feet deep. The bomb was apparently planted on the tracks and detonated while the second half of the train was passing.

Vladimir I. Yakunin, president of Russian Railways, said: "The basic version that is being investigated by the lead investigators is that it was an unknown device, by unknown persons. Simply put, a terrorist act."

Mr. Yakunin said a second, less powerful explosive went off Saturday at the site of the crash. No one was hurt.

On Saturday night, federal investigators were going house to house in the area around the crash, asking residents whether they had noticed anyone or anything suspicious recently.

Russia suffered a wave of attacks in the early part of the decade as Muslim separatists from Chechnya struck trains and public places in Moscow and elsewhere, but there have been no such deadly assaults in recent years.

However, another Nevsky Express train was derailed in 2007 by an explosion, wounding more than two dozen people. While two people were later arrested, their motive remains unclear.

On Saturday, all rail service between Moscow and St. Petersburg, 450 miles away, was temporarily suspended, and there were widespread reports that Russians were canceling trips out of concern over possible attacks.

In nationally televised remarks, President Dmitri A. Medvedev called for calm. "We need there to be no chaos, because the situation is tense as it is," the president said.

Victims spoke of disarray soon after the crash, with rescuers delayed in arriving and then lacking equipment to extract people from the railway cars, according to interviews on Russian television. They said it was several hours before proper equipment arrived.

At a hospital in St. Petersburg, a passenger, Igor Pushkaryov, 32, who suffered minor injuries, said in an interview that he had been in the second car on the train.

“It felt like we hit something, something hard,” Mr. Pushkaryov said. “Then everything began to shake because the wheel was rolling on the railroad ties. The car fell on its side and turned over. When we fell, the lights went out. We slid for a time, then suddenly stopped.”

A passenger named Igor Pechnikov told the Channel One television network: “I was riding in one of the cars that derailed. There was a jolt, and the car started sliding sharply to the left. I was thrown from my seat and flew halfway down the car.”

Another passenger, Tatyana Yeryomina, said: “Three of us went into the corridor to chat, when suddenly the lights went out and we fell to the floor. We were able to group together, which saved us. There was a huge hole in our car and we realized that something catastrophic had happened.”

When a frantic dispatcher reached the train after the derailment, the engineer described confusion.

“There is smoke everywhere,” the engineer said, according to a recording played on television. “The locomotive is damaged. Everything is torn apart in my cabin.”

The train was carrying more than 650 passengers and 20 railway personnel during its regular run to St. Petersburg, which takes four and a half hours.

On Saturday, Yekaterina Ivanova, one of the wounded passengers, told the NTV network that the evacuation was frustratingly slow.

“In the hospital, the doctors are better, the medical teams are working in harmony,” she said. “The young people from the Ministry of Emergency Situations carried us out on stretchers, but other people in uniform were just standing there and staring, and no one was even helping to carry out the wounded.”

Ms. Ivanova said rescue personnel did not manage to extract her from the train until 1:30 a.m., nearly four hours after the derailment.

Medical workers reported that reaching the scene was complicated because it was far from major highways.

Nadezhda Milyukova, the lead emergency doctor, told NTV: “There are only country roads, with huge ditches and puddles. You need all-terrain vehicles for those roads.”

Victims’ relatives told television networks that government hot lines did not function well, and that when they got through, there was little information.

“When we asked for some contact phone numbers, the lady told us that it didn’t fall within her job description,” a relative said.

Hundreds of passengers who survived the crash were moved onto a high-speed train and taken to St. Petersburg, arriving at 3:30 a.m. on Saturday. Several were in shock, and nearly all refused to speak about what had happened.

Police officers surrounded the platform, and ambulances pulled up to the train cars. Oleg Salov, a senior emergency situations official, said psychologists were meeting with relatives of the dead and wounded.

One of the train’s cafe cars was turned into a center for first aid and psychological assistance, and many passengers went there instead of home.

For Russians, the attack on Friday night may be reminiscent of terrorist acts that stirred unease across the country earlier in the decade, when Muslim separatists from Chechnya made passenger trains, subways and other public places targets.

A 2003 suicide bombing attack on a commuter train near Chechnya killed 44. At least 12 people were wounded in 2005 when a bomb derailed a train headed from Chechnya to Moscow. And in 2002, more than 100 hostages died in a rescue attempt after Chechen terrorists seized a theater in the heart of Moscow.

In interviews at railway stations on Saturday night, some travelers expressed concern about future attacks, while others shrugged off possible danger.

"Am I scared of traveling to St. Petersburg tonight? Yes, very much!" said a middle-aged woman named Valentina, who declined to give her last name while waiting at a Moscow station. "I purchased my tickets yesterday afternoon, before the catastrophe happened. If it weren't for the health of my relative, I wouldn't have come here."

She started crying. "This problem is not easily solved," she said. "And this train bombing might be a first terror attack in a chain."

#8

Lithuania's castle in the air?

In downturn, reconstruction of Royal Palace goes from spirit builder to boondoggle in eyes of many

By Craig Whitlock,

Washington Post, November 28, 2009

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA -- Version 2.0 of the Royal Palace of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was supposed to conjure this tiny country's glorious past. Instead, it has turned into a modern-day white elephant that is compounding a national economic nightmare.

Few countries have suffered as much from the global financial meltdown as Lithuania, which has seen its gross domestic product shrivel by 19 percent this year. As the jobless rate soars and the government struggles to pay its bills, one of the biggest casualties has been the Royal Palace, which has changed from a source of national pride into a public embarrassment.

Hampered by an empty treasury and huge cost overruns, construction has come almost to a standstill on the palace: a white-walled replica of the colossal 15th-century castle complex that once dominated Vilnius's baroque Old Town and represented the seat of an empire that reached from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

The original palace was razed in 1802 by Russia, which demolished it so thoroughly that it even sold off the rubble. Lithuanian nationalists, who have dreamed about resurrecting the castle for generations, finally got their chance after the country of 3.5 million people declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1990.

With the palace about half-built after seven years of labor, Lithuania can't afford to scrap the project, but it can't afford to finish it, either. The total price tag has tripled from original estimates, and government officials say they can't foresee when they will be able to come up with the \$70 million necessary to complete the job. "I'm afraid there is truly no chance in the near future for us to finish even such a revered building as this," Finance Minister Ingrida Simonyte told reporters last month.

Officials said they would slash by one-third the already meager construction budget for the palace next year. But for opponents of the palace, who cite the economic crisis gripping Lithuania, even that amount of spending is too much.

"The vultures are circling over the head of this country, eyeing its emaciated flesh," commented the Baltic Times newspaper. "Now it is becoming clear, through the skin-clad rib cage of the economy, that all that is left underneath is a life-sucking tumor that is eating away at the last resources of the country."

Along with its Baltic neighbors -- Latvia and Estonia -- Lithuania experienced an economic boom after it joined the European Union in 2004, with plenty of easy credit as foreign investors poured money into the region. The credit bubble popped last year, however, resulting in an enormous reverse flow of capital that has forced the government to implement draconian spending cuts.

The palace complex was supposed to have been done in time for the country's millennium celebration in July -- the 1,000th anniversary of the first recorded mention of Lithuania. (In 1009, a nun in the German city of Quedlinburg wrote that a local missionary, Saint Bruno, had been killed at the hands of pagans in "Lituae," or Lithuania.)

The palace did briefly open its gates for the Millennium Day ceremony, which was attended by several modern-day royals and heads of state from neighboring countries. Although the public was allowed a peek inside for a few days, the site has remained off-limits since then.

The new palace is intended to remind Lithuanians that their small country -- today about the size of West Virginia -- was once a great empire, ruling over much of present-day Belarus, Ukraine and Poland.

But reconstruction has been a major undertaking, not least because nobody can remember exactly what the original palace looked like. Historians have squabbled over the merits of the project, with many arguing that the money could be put to better use, such as restoring dozens of aging churches, synagogues and other extant sites in Vilnius.

"It's a fantasy, like Disney World," said Arturas Racas, editor in chief of the Baltic News Service. "The worst thing now is that you can't destroy it because so much money was spent on it, but we're left with a building that has no real meaning."

Supporters of the palace acknowledge that popular backing has waned since the economy crashed last year. But Kazys Almenas, founder of an advocacy group called the Palace Support Fund, said the cost of finishing the project would still barely make a dent in Lithuania's national budget.

"There are those who like to grandstand -- 'Oh, you're taking away money from the orphans,' " he said. "But eventually there is no question that it will be built. The question is just when."

Almenas, a retired nuclear engineering professor from the University of Maryland at College Park, was displaced from Lithuania as a child during World War II and immigrated to the United States. He returned to Vilnius in 1999 and has lobbied on behalf of the palace ever since.

He conceded that many Lithuanians still don't see the need to rebuild a palace that vanished more than 200 years ago. But he argued that the return of the royal quarters was the only way to fill a long-standing void in the city center.

"When the castle was razed, you walked down Castle Street and what was there? Just a bunch of trees. Something was definitely wrong," he said. "What kind of Castle Street is it if you don't have a castle at the end?"

#9

Lithuanian Premier Says Won't 'Kill' Economy for Euro

By Agnes Lovasz

Bloomberg, November 27, 2009

Lithuania won't adhere to a "painful" euro adoption schedule that would quell demand and hurt the economy, Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius said.

The former Soviet state will probably fail to comply with the European Union's excessive deficit procedure, which calls on the government to bring the gap within 3 percent of gross domestic product by 2011, Finance Minister Ingrida Simonyte said in an interview yesterday. Euro adoption is unlikely before 2013, she said.

"Those are very ambitious measures, very painful measures, and of course there are some limits to what you can implement," Kubilius said in an interview in London yesterday. The goal is "not killing the whole economy and the stability in your society when you are cutting expenditures, wages and pensions."

The economy of the Baltic state, which abandoned communism in 1991, contracted 14.3 percent last quarter as the government pushed through budget cuts equivalent to 8 percent of gross domestic product this year. Even after the austerity measures, Lithuania will post a deficit of 9.7 percent in 2011, compared with 9.8 percent this year, the European Commission estimates.

Lithuania, which pegs the litas to the euro, needs the euro "as soon as possible, but possibilities have very practical limits and practical measures that should be implemented," Kubilius said.

More Cuts

The government has proposed budget cuts for 2010 worth 5 percent of GDP that target social benefits, such as maternity and jobless pay and pensions.

Credit-default swap spreads on five-year Lithuanian debt jumped 19.08 basis points, to 343.01 basis points yesterday, the highest since Sept. 10, according to CMA DataVision prices. A wider spread reflects investor perceptions of higher risk.

Lithuania is lagging behind neighboring Estonia, which is set to join the single currency bloc in January 2011 after its government used years of budget surpluses to build up reserves, leaving public finances intact even after the credit crisis engulfed its economy. Latvia has said its economic collapse will prevent it from joining the euro region before 2014.

All three countries enjoyed a property and income boom after joining the EU in 2004. The credit crisis laid to waste the debt-fueled surge in wealth that followed EU accession and the three states are now mired in the bloc's deepest recessions.

Debt Sales

"We would be very happy if our neighbors, Estonia, are able to have the euro much earlier," Kubilius said. "It will show us very clearly what different policies Estonia and Lithuania were implementing during the last four, five years. Estonia had very strict fiscal control and surpluses in their budget, and we had deficits. Now, during the recession and financial crisis, that makes quite a big difference. Estonia is fighting to keep the deficit below 3 percent and we are fighting to keep it below 9 percent."

Lithuania will probably return to international markets to sell bonds by next spring and again in the second half of the year, Simonyte said yesterday. She declined to specify the size or currency of any potential debt sale.

Unlike neighboring Latvia, Lithuania won't go to the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance as it's able to fund itself through capital markets, Kubilius said.

"The policies required by the IMF or the EU we can implement ourselves, therefore we have possibilities to borrow in international markets," Kubilius said. "Those possibilities are becoming better and better as the price for borrowing is decreasing. We hope that during next year the price will go down even more."

Lithuania raised \$1.5 billion on Oct. 7 in its biggest-ever debt sale with the notes priced to yield 462.5 basis more than U.S. Treasuries.

#10

Anti-Semitism growing in Europe, waning in Russia - Rabbi Interfax, November 30, 2009

Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar has expressed concern about growing anti-Semitism in Europe.

"Here in Russia the situation was rather serious just recently. Synagogues would be blown up, graves destroyed and Jews attacked. The situation has improved now. But in Europe, the situation is what it was in Russia in the worst years," Lazar told the Russian leadership, according to the rabbi's press service.

"Happily, the situation is improving in Russia," he said.

"That's not just my impression. I often meet with the leaders of international organizations, which monitor anti-Semitic sentiment, and they see positive trends in this country. By contrast, the situation has been deteriorating in many of the European countries, especially in recent years," the rabbi said.

On the life of the Jewish community in Russia, he said that, "dozens of Jewish schools have opened over the past few years and new synagogues and community centers are build each year."

"Two hundred cities have Jewish communities. But what matters most in combating anti-Semitism, aggressive nationalism and xenophobia is prevention. People must be reared in the right ideology," Lazar said.

The fight against xenophobia and anti-Semitism is scoring successes, the rabbi said, noting that, "the government has been demonstrating a robust approach to those who popularize hatred and ethnic enmity."

Forty-seven people were prosecuted in the first nine months of 2009 on charges of anti-Semitism, and all of them were convicted, six of them to prison terms of five to ten years, he said.

#11

Russia Unveils Proposal For European Security Treaty RFE/RL, November 30, 2009

Moscow has released a draft of a proposal for a new European security agreement the Kremlin says should replace outdated institutions such as NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The text, posted on the Kremlin's website on November 29, comes more than a year after President Dmitry Medvedev first formally raised the issue. Speaking in Berlin in June 2008, Medvedev said the new pact was necessary to finally update Cold War-era arrangements.

"I'm convinced that Europe's problems won't be solved until its unity is established, an organic wholeness of all its integral parts, including Russia," Medvedev said.

Medvedev called the United States, European Union, and Russia the "three branches of European civilization." But Western countries have largely ignored his proposals so far. Analysts say the Kremlin proposal is unrealistic and chiefly aimed at boosting Moscow's role in international affairs by undermining NATO and the OSCE.

Speaking in Berlin last year, Medvedev said NATO has been "unable to find a new meaning for its existence" since the end of the Cold War.

"Today they're trying to find it by trying to globalize the alliance's mission, including by encroaching on the prerogatives of the UN and attracting new members," he said. "It's clear that won't solve the tasks at hand."

In a statement on its website on November 29, the Kremlin said the new European security treaty would be based on the principle that "no nation or international organization...is entitled to strengthen its own security at the cost of other nations or organizations."

The draft calls for the UN Security Council to "bear primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security." Russia is one of the council's five veto-holding, permanent members.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the alliance would reply to the Kremlin's draft.

'Propaganda Exercise'

Relations between Moscow and the West sank to near Cold War levels when Russia invaded neighboring Georgia in August 2008, shortly after issuing its proposal for a new security agreement.

Analysts say the Russian initiative isn't really aimed at improving relations. Political expert Andrei Piontkovsky calls it a set of "empty declarations."

"It's a kind of propaganda exercise in a very old tradition of Soviet peace initiatives," Piontkovsky says. "I don't think Moscow seriously hopes that this document will be signed."

Piontkovsky says the draft provides only a vague promise for countries "to be friendly," and that it's unclear even who the signatories would be.

The text also says members would be "entitled to consider an armed attack against any other party an armed attack against itself." But unlike NATO's Article 5, the Russian proposal wouldn't oblige members to respond to attacks against fellow members.

Beyond another polite response, Piontkovsky says, Western countries won't seriously consider the treaty proposal.

#12

Moscow Mayor Wins Another Libel Suit RFE/RL, December 1, 2009

A Moscow court has ordered liberal politician Boris Nemtsov to pay the city's powerful mayor the equivalent of \$17,100 for libel.

The court on November 30 also ordered the respected "Kommersant" daily to pay Mayor Yury Luzhkov another \$17,100 for publishing an interview with Nemtsov repeating some of his corruption allegations against the mayor.

Both Nemtsov and the newspaper will have to retract the statements deemed libelous.

Luzhkov is famous for never having lost a libel suit in his 18-year tenure.

Nemtsov, a former deputy prime minister and co-founder of the Union of Rightist Forces party, appeared unfazed by the court ruling.

Speaking in court minutes after the ruling, he sought to put a positive spin on the case and even cracked jokes about Luzhkov, drawing laughter from journalists.

"I am happy that almost all of Luzhkov's claims against me were rejected. He was demanding the retraction of seven sentences, and there's just one left," Nemtsov said.

"I need to retract the sentence: 'For many Muscovites, it is no secret that corruption permeates all levels of Moscow authorities.' That's what I will write: 'For many Muscovites, it is a secret...'"

Press Freedom Concerns

The decision to punish "Kommersant," however, has raised some concern over press freedom in Russia.

"I think that our justice's decision to give 'Kommersant' a 500,000-[ruble] fine for nothing at all as it celebrates its 100th anniversary is an absolute disgrace and an open effort to pressure," Nemtsov said.

"Kommersant" lawyer Dmitry Zharkov said Luzhkov's lawsuit was an attempt to muzzle journalists.

"We will swiftly appeal the court's decision. A brief appeal has already been prepared. We consider that the sum is designed to frighten the media into no longer writing anything negative about Yury Luzhkov," Zharkov said.

Luzhkov had initially sought 10 times more money from each Nemtsov and "Kommersant" in his lawsuit, filed after Nemtsov published a brochure earlier this year reviewing his 18-year career as Moscow boss.

The brochure accused Luzhkov of using his post as city mayor to promote the business interests of his wife, Yelena Baturina, Russia's richest woman and the owner of a major construction firm.

The report branded the mayor a "thief" and a "corrupt official."

Earlier this year, Luzhkov won a libel case against "The New York Times" over an article alleging that he supported separatists in Moldova and Crimea.

#13

Russia Is Upbeat About Economic Growth By Natasha Brereton and Clare Connaghan Wall Street Journal, December 2, 2009

LONDON -- The Russian government expects the economy to continue growing next year and accelerate in 2011, even if oil prices drop unexpectedly, a senior government minister said Tuesday.

Andrei Klepach, Russian deputy minister for economic development, told a bankers conference that the economy should grow 2% in the fourth quarter from the third, but the government is sticking with its forecast for an 8.5% drop overall in 2009.

Russia's economy returned to growth in the third quarter, prompting officials to declare that the country has emerged from its first recession in a decade.

In 2010, the economy should grow at least 1.3%, while in 2011, an expansion of 5% to 6% is "quite realistic," he said.

"In 2011 and 2012, a lot will depend on the stabilization of oil prices, whether it's going to be \$65 or \$75 per barrel or more," he said.

The government's budgets were based on \$58 per barrel, compared with the current price of just under \$80. Mr. Klepach said he agreed with projections by many oil analysts that the more realistic outlook for the next few years would be \$75 per barrel or higher.

Still, he cautioned that high Russian interest rates and strengthening in the ruble pose serious risks to economic growth.

The Russian central bank has cut interest rates by four percentage points since April to help revive the Russian economy and discourage foreign-exchange speculators.

At 9% today, Russia's rates far outpace international averages and are attracting foreign capital, which is driving up the ruble rate and pressuring Russia's export industry.

Mr. Klepach said a serious wave of unemployment growth was likely this winter. The Russian jobless rate stood at 7.7% through October.

Deputy Central Bank Chairman Alexei Ulyukayev, also at the conference, said the bank would look for opportunities to cut rates to discourage speculators.

#14

Putin says Russia crisis peaked, terror threat high

By Michael Stott and Gleb Bryanski

Reuters, December 3, 2009

MOSCOW - Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said on Thursday Russia had passed the peak of the economic crisis but a train bombing last week showed the threat of what he called terrorist attacks was "very high."

Opening an annual question-and-answer session with the Russian people looking relaxed and confident, Putin said the worst of the crisis was over and he expected the economy to shrink 8.5-8.7 percent this year, less than some had expected.

"The economy has grown by an average of 0.5 percent per month over the last five months," Putin said in the session, broadcast live nationwide by state television and radio.

"I'm counting on these positive trends in economic development becoming more significant in the middle of next year."

Putin's eighth annual phone-in showed the premier, Russia's most powerful leader, back on form after an uncharacteristically subdued performance last year amid the economic crisis.

An increase in oil prices has helped pull the Russian economy from the brink of collapse this year but despite billions of dollars of government aid, Russia still lags far behind emerging market peers such as Brazil, India and China.

Islamist rebels have claimed responsibility for detonating a bomb under a luxury express train as it traveled from Moscow to St Petersburg last week, derailing and wrecking carriages and killing 26 people, including some senior officials.

Putin said Russia was determined to "break the spine" of terrorism and called for tough and decisive action against "criminals" who attacked their own people.

"The threat of terrorism remains very high," Putin said.

Many questioners asked Putin about their jobs and their pensions, including workers in the town of Pikalyovo, which the premier visited in the summer to help a cement factory threatened with closure and scold its oligarch owner.

"The situation in one-industry towns, including Pikalyovo, is under control," Putin said.

TRAIN BOMB

Asked why nobody was in jail for allowing the crisis to hit Pikalyovo, the prime minister shot back: "If we put everyone in jail, who would work?"

The televised question session "A Conversation with Vladimir Putin. The Sequel" was conducted in a specially built Moscow studio with invited guests.

It included video links to Pikalyovo, to an aircraft plant in a Far Eastern city and to the turbine room of the giant Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric dam in Siberia, damaged in an August accident which killed 75.

All questions were screened in advance and access to the Moscow studio and the video link-up locations was by invitation only. Journalists were not given access to the questioners. Enthusiastic presenters beamed as they counted more than one million questions submitted by phone, internet and text message. "351 people are calling each minute," anchor Maria Sittel said.

Putin reassured a grieving widow from the dam about her children's education, calmed factory workers worried about their jobs, joked over his sometimes awkward relationship with the leader of neighboring Belarus and praised a grandmother who had helped victims of the train bomb.

A caller said that a old woman who lived near the train crash site and cared for the victims, lived in horrible conditions and her fence was damaged during rescue work.

"You have a good heart. Just like this old woman. Do not worry, everything will be fine with her," Putin said, adding that Russian Railways had already doubled the old woman's pension and would fix her fence and the house.

The mixture of folksy charm, tough leadership, mastery of detail, promises to resolve individual problems and an uncanny ability to understand the lives of ordinary Russians is at the heart of Putin's still-impressive political appeal.

Helped by lavish coverage on state media and an absence of credible political opponents, Putin still dominates Russian politics 10 years after he was first picked as a successor by ailing then-president Boris Yeltsin.

Although his ratings have drooped slightly to an eight-month low of 65 percent, down from 72 percent in mid-October, according to the FOM pollster, they remain numbers most politicians would die for after 10 years in power.

They also outshine those of his hand-picked successor Dmitry Medvedev, whom most Russians believe has little real power. It was almost two hours into the question session before Putin mentioned Medvedev's name at all.

Putin, who served as president from 2000-08 before handing over his Kremlin post to Medvedev, spent all day Wednesday in his residence in a forested Moscow suburb preparing for the show.

#15

Putin: Will consider running for president in 2012

By Vladimir Isachenkov

AP, December 3, 2009

In an electric four-hour solo performance on live television, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said he will think about whether to reclaim the presidency — one of the strongest signals yet that he may run again for Russia's top office in 2012.

Putin made the statement during a question-and-answer show on television and radio highlighted his dominance of Russia's political scene.

"I will think about it, there is still enough time," Putin said when asked whether he will run in the next election.

"Don't hold your breath," Putin told another person who asked whether he was planning to leave politics.

Putin added he wants to focus now on his job as premier and make sometimes unpopular decisions without having to take electoral considerations into account.

Putin had to shift into the premier's seat in 2008 following two consecutive terms in office, but since then the presidential term has been extended to six years and Putin is eligible to run again in 2012.

Putin's marathon television show, similar to previous call-ins he did when he was president, demonstrated that he continued to call the shots, overshadowing his designated successor, President Dmitry Medvedev. Putin has said earlier that instead of competing against each other in 2012, he and Medvedev will "sit down and decide" who will run as the elections get closer.

The bookish Medvedev was in Italy on Thursday to meet with the Italian leaders and the pope. Medvedev has never made a similar appearance on television since his March 2008 election.

Asked about his "tandem" with Medvedev, Putin said their common educational background and views allowed them to "efficiently work together."

Putin, who has cast himself as a paternal figure protecting people from the threat of terrorism and economic upheavals, vowed Thursday that the Russian government will step up the fight against terrorism.

He said the threat of terrorism remains "very high" following a deadly train bombing that killed 26 people last week and promised that authorities would act "very harshly" to root out militants.

"We have enough resolve and firmness for that," he said, opening a session with 2 million people able to ask questions by telephone and the Internet.

The bombing last Friday of the Moscow-to-St.Petersburg express train fueled fears that Russia could face another wave of terror attacks. It was the first deadly terrorist strike outside the North Caucasus since the bombings of two airliners and a Moscow subway station attack in 2004.

"We have done a lot to break the spine of terrorism, but the threat is still here," Putin said. "The entire society, all of us must be aware of that threat."

He urged a stronger pre-emptive action by law-enforcement agencies and called on the Russian people to show more vigilance.

Putin also focused heavily on economy during Thursday's show, which featured televised links with workers from several industrial towns.

Putin said Russia has "overcome the peak of the crisis" and claimed credit for softening its impact. He added that the government will have to spend more money to support the economy for the time being.

"The exit (strategy) will take time and effort as well as substantial funds," Putin said.

Russia is weathering its worst economic downturn in a decade as commodities prices – the backbone of its economy – collapsed late last year. But it emerged from the recession in the third quarter rising by a seasonally adjusted 0.6 percent.

The Russian prime minister once again took time to burnish his common-man appeal.

He chastised the Russian rich for arrogantly showing off their wealth, saying that their fancy imported cars look as grotesque as golden teeth.

Putin also promised a tough action to clean up the nation's police forces, which have faced mounting criticism for rampant corruption and other abuses.

He promised a more compensation to a widow of a worker who was among 75 people who died in a disastrous accident at Russia's largest hydroelectric plant, and wage hikes and more social benefits to many others.

"If the situation demands it, I will come to you or to any other place in the Russian Federation, it's my duty," he said.

Delving into foreign policy issues, he sharply admonishing the United States for keeping "anachronistic" Cold War-era trade restrictions imposed to penalize the Soviet Union for its refusal to allow free emigration of the Jews.

"The Soviet Union is gone, but they (restrictions) have remained," he said.

Putin also accused the United States of hampering Russia's accession into the World Trade Organization.

"Accession into the WTO remains our strategic goal, but some nations, including the United States, are impeding Russia's WTO bid," he said.

#16

Russia shifts stance on Iran, Ahmadinejad defiant

By Oleg Shchedrov

Reuters, December 1, 2009

MOSCOW - Russia will join any consensus on more sanctions against Iran, a senior Russian diplomatic source said on Tuesday after Tehran declared it would expand nuclear activity in defiance of a U.N. rebuke.

It was a thinly veiled Russian warning to Iran of waning patience with its failure to allay fears it aims to develop atom bombs in secret, and hinted that Iran could no longer rely on Russia to stop tougher world action against it.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad voiced defiance on Tuesday, saying sanctions would have no effect and that no more talks on the nuclear dispute were needed with the West. Speaking on state television, he also criticized Russian action.

Governors of the U.N. nuclear agency passed a resolution on Friday censuring Iran for covertly constructing a second enrichment plant near the holy city of Qom, in addition to its IAEA-monitored one at Natanz, and demanding a construction halt.

Tehran said on Sunday it would build 10 more uranium enrichment sites -- a pledge that Ahmadinejad said on Tuesday was "not a bluff".

Iran's announcement had been in retaliation for the 25-3 vote by the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors, which sailed through with unusual Russian and Chinese support.

"If there is a consensus on Iran sanctions, we will not stand aside," said the Russian diplomatic source, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

By referring to "consensus", Russia could be leaving itself an escape hatch since China has been the most resistant to punitive steps against Iran among the six world powers.

The source made clear Moscow would not move so fast to embrace harsher sanctions as the United States and EU powers, who want to act early next year if Tehran has not begun fulfilling IAEA demands for nuclear restraint and transparency by then.

"We will be thinking about sanctions but this is not an issue of the next few hours or weeks," he said.

Russia did not want to complicate the situation with threats against Iran.

"We would rather have Iran cooperating more openly and consistently with the IAEA and showing clear steps to lift concerns -- which are gaining greater foundation -- than introducing sanctions against Iran," the source said.

AHMADINEJAD RESPONSE

In his televised comments, Ahmadinejad dismissed the threat of sanctions and warned any "aggressor" against Iran.

"Sanctions will have no effect. Aggressors will regret their action as soon as they put their finger on the trigger," he said.

Israel has hinted at the possibility of attacking Iranian facilities if it deems diplomacy at a dead end.

Ahmadinejad said Western attempts to isolate Iran were in vain and he criticized Russia.

"Russia made a mistake by backing the anti-Iran resolution and we believe that their analysis in this regard was incorrect," he said.

The Russian source said Iran's plan for 10 more enrichment plants did "not add optimism to talks", in a reference to talks with Tehran revived in October but stalled by disputes.

The United States and its allies fear Iran will divert its declared civilian nuclear energy program to yielding atomic bombs, not electricity. Tehran says it has no such intention.

Concerns have deepened over Iran's retreat from an October deal in principle that would see its low-enriched uranium -- which is potential fissile material for bombs -- sent abroad for processing into fuel for a nuclear medicine reactor in Tehran.

"The situation surrounding the agency is stormy now. We have a lot of difficult challenges," new IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano told reporters on his first day in office after succeeding Mohamed ElBaradei. Amano declined to elaborate.

IAEA spokeswoman Gill Tudor said Iran had not yet informed the U.N. nuclear inspectorate directly of its new enrichment plans and that it would seek clarification from Tehran.

Western diplomats and analysts believe the new enrichment plan may be largely bluster, possibly a negotiating gambit by Iran, and would take many years if not decades to execute.

But analysts said the risk remained of Iran using an array of above-board civilian enrichment plants to camouflage one or two small covert sites geared to enriching uranium to the high purity suitable for nuclear warheads.

#17

Ahmadinejad blasts nuclear partner Russia over IAEA vote

By Jay Deshmukh and Hiedeh Farmani

AFP, December 1, 2009

TEHRAN – Iran hit out at its longtime nuclear partner Russia Tuesday over a yes vote for a censure motion at the UN atomic watchdog and insisted it was serious about plans for 10 more uranium enrichment plants.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that despite the support given in the International Atomic Energy Agency vote on Friday by Russia and China, Western governments would not succeed in their efforts to isolate Iran.

In a rare tirade against the government that has been building Iran's first nuclear power plant in the Gulf port of Bushehr and had been expected to deliver advanced air-defence missiles for its facilities, Ahmadinejad said Russia had made a "mistake" in its vote at the IAEA.

"Russia made a mistake. It does not have an accurate analysis of today's world situation," Ahmadinejad said in a televised interview.

He vowed that despite the setback Western powers would not succeed in isolating Iran and dismissed any possibility of military action, a resort never ruled out by Israel or the United States.

"Any finger which is about to pull the trigger will be cut off," Ahmadinejad said.

"They need us more than we need them. It is psychological warfare and isolating Iran is impossible."

He said that despite Friday's censure vote, which was backed by 25 out of 35 voting members of the IAEA to just three against -- Malaysia, Venezuela and Cuba -- Iran was deadly serious about its plans to build 10 additional uranium enrichment plants as a riposte.

The vote called on Iran to stop construction of its second uranium enrichment plant under construction near the central Shiite shrine city of Qom.

"There is no room to bluff in this regard," Ahmadinejad said of the 10 further plants he announced on Sunday to condemnation from Western governments.

"We will follow through on what we say."

Ahmadinejad lashed out at Britain and Israel over the IAEA censure motion but expressed only concern that Washington had failed to deliver on the initial promise of dialogue from the administration of President Barack Obama.

"The agency should not have bowed to pressure by Britain and Zionist regime. Resolutions and sanctions are worthless in our view," he said.

"Obama's behaviour is worrying. We expected him to make changes," the Iranian president added.

"He has especially talked a lot about Iran and we have always welcomed that and sent him messages. If there are opportunities and if he is honest, then we can take a step. But we are worried now that he cannot and the previous story continues."

Ahmadinejad warned that Iran might reduce its cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog to the bare minimum, having cooperated previously and been punished.

"It is natural that the least we can do is to go down to the legal level and examine limitations (on cooperation). We have so far cooperated beyond the legally required levels."

He even said that a recent nuclear fuel deal being discussed between Iran and world powers was actually an Iranian proposal, and criticised the IAEA, which brokered the talks, for insisting that Iran send out its low-enriched uranium for fear of being used in making a bomb.

"This was nonsense," the hardliner said.

Iran insists that it carried out its obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in notifying the IAEA of its building work on its second enrichment plant, a position the UN agency does not accept.

Earlier China had insisted that there was still room for diplomacy to allay Western concerns about Iran's nuclear intentions.

Foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said: "Sanctions are not the goal of the resolution. We should properly solve this issue through dialogue and negotiation," adding China voted for the IAEA resolution in a bid to spur dialogue.

But Tehran criticised even Beijing, despite its longtime opposition to a fourth round of UN sanctions.

"There would be no change in strategic relations with these two countries (Russia and China), but we will express our unhappiness to them," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told a news conference.

Russia had already rowed back on its opposition to any more sanctions. President Dmitry Medvedev said recently that Iran could face further action if it fails to allay Western concerns about its intentions.

On Tuesday, a Russian diplomat underlined the warning to Iran.

"We need to keep such an option in mind and consider the fact of sanctions," he said.

#18

Kazakhstan's Rights Record Comes Under Fresh Criticism Reuters, December 2, 2009

ATHENS -- Kazakhstan's human rights record came under fresh criticism today as the former Soviet republic prepared to take over the chair of Europe's top security body for the first time from Greece.

Officials at a meeting of the 56-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Athens said the Central Asian state had made some progress but urged it to use its turn at the helm to improve its democratic institutions.

"Clearly there is a challenge for the incoming chairmanship, whether it will be able to lead by example," the head of the group's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Janez Lenarcic, said as the OSCE held its last top-level meeting before Kazakhstan formally takes over on January 1.

Human rights groups have criticized the decision to hand the chair to Kazakhstan, pointing out that OSCE observers have not validated a single election in the oil-producing state, and urged members to push harder for reforms.

"In the two years since Kazakhstan was awarded the chair, its human rights situation has seriously deteriorated, especially in the areas of freedom of expression, religion and assembly," said Vera Tkachenko, representing a coalition of human rights groups, including Freedom House.

Human Rights Watch also urged OSCE foreign ministers to push Kazakhstan harder. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev was a member of the last Soviet politburo and has been in power ever since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"We need to have conversations with the Kazakh government on the importance and the opportunity for them to use their chairmanship to address some of the concerns on these issues," U.S. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg told reporters.

OSCE Summit Unlikely

Kazakh officials said they were committed to OSCE principles and already making efforts to improve human rights, but British-style democracy could not be built overnight.

"If you want to get the U.K.'s level you must take a very rapid lift which will raise your blood pressure, it will affect the body. We should be very careful," said Adil Akhmetov, a Kazakh OSCE official. "We are coming up, and if someone criticizes Kazakhstan let them criticize it. Kazakhstan is doing its best."

Kazakh officials proposed holding an OSCE summit next year, which would be the first since leaders met in 1999 in Istanbul, but many members were skeptical.

"It can only be organized if we have true substance that we can deal with. If we can't come up with a political declaration here among the foreign ministers what kind of a value added would an actual political top level summit give?" said Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb on December 1.

Despite criticism of the organization's effectiveness, Western members gave a cool reception on December 1 to Russia's proposal for a new Euro-Atlantic security pact, saying focus should stay on improving existing structures.

#19

Arms Treaty Likely to Expire Before New Pact Is Set By Peter Baker and Clifford J. Levy New York Times, December 3, 2009

WASHINGTON — American and Russian negotiators are racing to solve the remaining obstacles to a new arms control treaty that would cut the world's two largest nuclear arsenals by up to a third and replace a cold-war-era pact that expires Saturday.

The delegations are working marathon hours in Geneva to resolve differences over verification and to settle other details of an agreement that would reduce the number of deployed strategic warheads, missiles, bombers and submarines to their lowest levels in a half century. A mostly complete text has been written and translated, and there have been discussions about where to hold a signing ceremony.

But it appears unlikely that they will complete their work by the time the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty of 1991, known as Start, expires, or that it can be ready for President Obama to sign when he visits Europe next week.

The idea of a ceremony next week had particular appeal because of the resonance of signing an arms control treaty on the same trip that Mr. Obama receives his Nobel Peace Prize, allowing him to position himself as a peacemaker even as he is escalating the war in Afghanistan.

Mr. Obama's goal of eventually ridding the world of nuclear arms is more popular in Europe and elsewhere than is the eight-year-old war in Afghanistan.

As recently as this week, officials in Geneva were talking about holding a signing ceremony in Reykjavik, Iceland, the scene of the 1986 summit meeting where Ronald Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev came close to an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons altogether. Other sites under consideration were Geneva and Helsinki, Finland.

But a White House official, who was not authorized to speak for attribution about the talks, said that "it's not going to happen" next week and that negotiators were now aiming for the end of the year. "We are working this hard, but it will only get done if it is a good agreement that advances our national interests," the official said.

The two sides appear close on the question of limits. Mr. Obama and President Dmitri A. Medvedev had already narrowed the range for a cap on warheads to between 1,500 and 1,675 during a meeting in July, down from about 2,200 each side has now. They are likely to agree to lower the ceiling on delivery vehicles — intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-based missiles and strategic bombers — to below 800, from 1,600, according to an American official, although that would not result in significant reductions because the United States has about 800 and Russia about 620.

The most significant differences center on verification and monitoring. "There's been a huge amount of progress just in the last week," said the American official, who also was not authorized to discuss the negotiations with reporters. But "there's going to have to be political heavy lifting in the next few days," the official said.

Konstantin I. Kosachev, chairman of the international affairs committee in Russia's Parliament, said final differences "require serious effort and compromise in the remaining time," according to his office. Speaking from Geneva, he said the delegations were continuing "tense, intense and substantive work practically around the clock."

Even if an agreement is reached in the coming days, the new treaty would need to be ratified by the Senate and the Russian Parliament, which could take months, so the two sides are working on a bridge agreement to continue inspections, verification and monitoring after Start expires.

One monitoring program, however, will not continue. The American observation station at Votkinsk, about 600 miles east of Moscow, will close by Saturday. Under Start, the station is staffed by Americans who monitor manufacturing of Topol-M ballistic missiles and other arms. The Kremlin has long chafed at the presence of an American outpost deep in its territory, since it closed its own monitoring station in the United States years ago.

Russia has taken a harder line on monitoring in part because its military and diplomatic establishment believes that a weakened Moscow in the waning days of the cold war made concessions that infringed upon its sovereignty.

"Russia is not interested in having the same scope of verification procedures that were in the earlier treaty," said Anton V. Khlopkov, director of the Center for Energy and Security Studies in Moscow. "There is this conclusion that these measures were too much, and too extensive."

But any concessions on verification could draw criticism in Washington, where Mr. Obama needs at least seven Republican votes in the Senate to ensure ratification. In a floor speech last month, Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, the Republican whip, said that verification had not “gotten the attention it deserved all along.”

Baker Spring, an analyst at the Heritage Foundation, said the administration should limit only warheads, not delivery vehicles, because such a limit could also restrict missiles that could be used as conventional weapons. “The administration is risking getting itself into trouble,” he said.

But Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, a research and advocacy group, said the treaty was an important step. “We’re 20 years after the cold war,” he said. “The only reason most of these weapons exist is to deter the use of them by the other.”

#20

Putin criticizes U.S. trade controls on Russia

**By Conor Sweeney and by Jonathan Lynn in Geneva; Editing by Michael Stott
Reuters, December 3, 2009**

MOSCOW - Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Thursday said the Cold War-era Jackson-Vanik amendment that tied U.S. trade relations to emigration rights for religious minorities was an anachronism and hindered Russia's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Putin's criticisms followed comments by the U.S. trade envoy that the Washington backed Russia's membership of the trade body and wanted to resolve outstanding bilateral issues.

Russia is the largest economy outside the 153-member trade organization that mediates commercial disputes and opens up trade between member states.

"Accession to the WTO remains our strategic goal, but we have an impression that for some unknown reasons some countries, including the United States, are hindering our accession to the WTO," said Putin during an annual question-and-answer session with Russian citizens.

Speaking Wednesday, before Putin's comments, the U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk told Reuters that the United States backed Russian entry.

"We're prepared to work diligently with them so that we can hasten their accession into the WTO," he said, during a WTO conference in Geneva.

When Russia proposed entering the trade body as a customs union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, neither the United States nor the WTO knew how this could work legally, he said.

"I won't comment on the customs union. We're thrilled that Russia's decided to move forward with their individual application on which we're going to work with them to resolve our outstanding bilateral issues," Kirk said.

#21

Putin Is Coy on a Run in 2012

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, December 4, 2009

MOSCOW — He answered pleas from workers in beleaguered one-factory towns and retirees anxious about pensions. But it was Vladimir V. Putin's response to a question about his political future that drew the most attention on Thursday at a lengthy public forum. Would he run for president again in 2012?

"I'll think about it," Mr. Putin said.

Mr. Putin, the former president and current prime minister, certainly did not act like a man in the twilight of his political career. He offered a virtuoso performance at his annual question-and-answer session, seeking to showcase his status as Russia's dominant leader and his concern for the average Russian.

Mr. Putin, 57, recited statistics and other details from memory on many subjects. The nationally televised session was four hours and nearly 90 questions long, yet it seemed as if Mr. Putin would not have minded had it gone longer.

Asked at one point whether it was time to relax after many years of government service, he grinned and said, "Don't hold your breath."

Mr. Putin served two terms as president, beginning in 2000, but could not run for a third consecutive one because of term limits, so he endorsed his close aide Dmitri A. Medvedev, who was elected in 2008 and named Mr. Putin as prime minister.

Despite an economy weakened by the financial crisis, Mr. Putin remains popular, and were he to run for president again in 2012, he could conceivably serve another two terms, through early 2024, when he would be 71.

The current term is four years, but last year, Mr. Medvedev pushed through a constitutional change that lengthened the term to six years. That was widely interpreted as an effort by Mr. Putin to ensure that he could wield power for many years.

On Thursday, Mr. Putin said: "Depending on how the situation turns out with the economy, and in the social sphere, appropriate action will be taken regarding the election campaign of 2012. But it is now only 2009."

Even so, Mr. Putin repeatedly spoke of his success at stabilizing the Russian economy and reacting rapidly to problems across the nation, from disasters to small personal troubles. "People believe in the positive future of this country," he said.

To some extent, events on Thursday underscored the unusual arrangement between Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev, who govern in what they describe as a "tandem leadership." Though Mr. Medvedev nominally has the higher office, he has not held such question-and-answer sessions, and while Mr. Putin was holding court, Mr. Medvedev spent Thursday on a trip to Italy.

Asked there whether he would run for re-election, Mr. Medvedev said he would decide with Mr. Putin.

"As we both have said, we are close to one another, we understand one another and we work together," Mr. Medvedev said. "We will be able to agree in some way without elbowing each other aside."

The remarks by both men underscore how they have tended to provide relatively coy assessments of what lies ahead, recognizing that the instant one says he will not run in 2012, he becomes a lame duck.

The political class here regularly searches for a schism between the two, but evidence has been hard to come by. At the same time, Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev have developed somewhat different agendas, as was clear from Mr. Putin's answers at the Moscow forum on Thursday.

Mr. Putin skirted or ignored issues that have been Mr. Medvedev's focus, including corruption, economic innovation and human rights. Just last month, Mr. Medvedev delivered a state of the nation speech in which he said that if Russia did not modernize, it would fall far behind other leading countries.

In October, Mr. Medvedev denounced Stalin. Mr. Putin indicated Thursday that he had a more nuanced view, saying that Stalin committed horrible crimes but also won World War II and industrialized the Soviet Union.

“Any historical events should be analyzed in their entirety,” Mr. Putin said.

Mr. Medvedev has spoken out in favor of liberalizing the political system, while Mr. Putin, who has been criticized by opposition parties as an autocrat, has expressed satisfaction with the current structure.

The Kremlin lavishly produced and promoted the forum on Thursday, with officials appealing for questions by phone, e-mail or text message. More than two million were received, more than at last year’s session.

Mr. Putin heard from Irina Tsvetkova in Omsk, who had a question about using government aid for disabled children, and Oleg Trusov in Rostov-on-Don, who sought help so that his 84-year-old aunt could receive housing for war veterans.

Mr. Putin declared that the government was doing everything it could to resuscitate the industrial hinterlands. He addressed questions about the shoddy health care system, unemployment and education. He vowed to defeat terrorism in the wake of a deadly bombing of a luxury train last week.

The presentation at times took on the feel of a review of Mr. Putin’s 2009 achievements. State television sent correspondents to locations around Russia that Mr. Putin had visited to address crises: Pikalevo, a town where the people had protested unpaid wages at their one factory; Tolyatti, Russia’s Detroit, where the massive auto complex is ailing; and a Siberian hydroelectric plant, where scores died in an accident.

From those sites, people were shown live thanking Mr. Putin for his help; but they then often followed up with sharply worded requests for more. Indeed, while Mr. Putin had his share of softball questions, many did not shy from contentious topics.

A woman named Tatyana Gulina from Pikalevo said the town was slowly dying. “We are being forced out,” she said. “What are we to do? How do we survive?”

It was one of many questions that Mr. Putin received about troubled industrial regions. He told her that conditions would improve. And in response to a question about why he visited Pikalevo, he suggested that he would continue such trips.

“I thought it correct and appropriate to send a message to society and leaders of all levels and to tell them that they would be held accountable,” he said.

#22

Russia’s proposal for a new European security architecture: The wrong blueprint

By Daniel P. Fata and David J. Kramer

German Marshall Fund, December 3, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC — On the eve of this week’s Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO Ministerial meetings, in addition to a NATO-Russia Council gathering, Russian officials unveiled their long-awaited proposal for a new European Security Treaty. The Medvedev proposal, as it has become known, has been the subject of considerable debate within NATO and among OSCE member states. Some argue that it represents an important opportunity to engage with Russia on addressing security needs in Europe. Others counter that instead of focusing on the Russian proposal, emphasis should be on revitalizing existing security arrangements, not their replacement or total overhaul.

Skeptics of the Russian proposal, ourselves included, question negotiating a new architecture with Russia when Moscow currently is not in compliance with existing security arrangements, namely, the Adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and last summer’s Georgia ceasefire agreement. If Russia does not abide by these agreements, on what basis can there be sufficient trust and confidence that Russia will adhere to new arrangements? Furthermore, according to the text released by the Kremlin, “A Party to the Treaty shall not undertake, participate in, or support any actions or activities affecting

significantly security of any other Party or Parties to the Treaty.” Russia is already in violation of this clause through its continued illegal troop presence in Georgia’s separatist regions and forces in the Moldovan separatist area of Transnistria, contrary to the position of the government in Chisinau and the 1999 Istanbul Commitments.

Russia also uses other methods short of military force that significantly affect the security of its neighbors, including energy cutoffs, cyber attacks, or bans on other countries’ exports. Such tactics and behavior clearly run counter to existing security arrangements, to say nothing of the new Russian proposal. Finally, but not surprisingly, the Russian draft makes no reference to human rights standards and democratization, key issues for the OSCE and NATO.

The idea for a new European security architecture first emerged in June 2008 when newly-elected Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, in a speech in Berlin, called for a “legally binding treaty.” Medvedev warned against “marginalizing and isolating countries, creating zones with differentiated levels of security, and abandoning the creation of general regional collective security systems.”

In the 18 months it took to flesh out Medvedev’s idea, it became clear that Russia was interested in creating a new pan-European security architecture to replace Cold War-era institutions such as NATO and OSCE. Moscow considers today’s institutions incapable of addressing 21st century security challenges.

Many observers suspected the Russian proposal was designed to marginalize the U.S. on European security matters and drive wedges between and among allies in order to increase Europe’s reliance on Moscow. European leaders, particularly in countries along Russia’s borders and those most vulnerable to Russian pressure over energy supplies, made clear that the U.S. is central to any such discussions.

The Russian proposal also reflects the view in Moscow that NATO and EU enlargement poses a threat to Russia, ignores Russian interests in the region, and increases instability. In fact, Russia’s western borders have become more stable and secure since the enlargement of NATO to Central and Eastern Europe. For example, since becoming members of the EU and NATO, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have become more stable, democratic neighbors. The signing of a border treaty between Latvia and Russia in May 2007 and the visit seven months later by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Riga were simply not possible before Latvia joined NATO.

To be fair, one should not reflexively dismiss all Russian concerns, for Moscow has a point in observing that existing security institutions have struggled at times to address key issues and to determine their role in the changing security environment. After all, the Georgia-Russia crisis exposed weaknesses in NATO, the EU, and the OSCE. However, the solution is not to scrap these organizations but to reform them. The efforts by a group of experts led by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to revise NATO’s Strategic Concept, to be unveiled in Lisbon at next year’s NATO summit, are the first steps in correcting that organization’s shortcomings.

In addition, NATO members must engage frequently in strategic discussions on key security challenges. This is simply not happening today. Instead, many Allies hesitate to discuss issues such as Iran, missile defense, and Georgia for fear of jangling politically sensitive nerves. The EU must also spend more time addressing key security issues affecting its member states — Afghanistan in particular. Furthermore, greater practical cooperation between the EU and NATO is imperative. The world’s security challenges are too complex and numerous for one organization to focus solely on military issues and another to focus solely on civilian issues.

NATO, the EU, and the OSCE have served and will continue to serve increasingly important roles in managing transatlantic security challenges, but they are certainly not perfect and need to be improved. That is far different from replacing them or subordinating them to a larger superstructure. Cooperation and dialogue among the allies and with Russia must increase. If Moscow were to respect the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights and rule of law, and the peaceful settlement of disputes — principles already enshrined in existing arrangements — pan-European and transatlantic security would be greatly improved.