

**WASHINGTON, D.C. March 12, 2010**



**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

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

In Brief: Ukraine President's Coalition Emerges; Turkey/Armenia; Remembering "Operation Exodus"

Dear Friend,

There are many interesting articles and op-eds in this week's update. Please make to sure to read the stories about Ukrainian President Yanukovich's successful formation of a new government; many had thought that his efforts would fail, forcing new parliamentary elections. Also, speculation continues about how Yanukovich will remake Ukraine-Russia relations. Everyone anticipates they will be more amicable, but how much more, and at what cost?

The U.S. Department of State issued its 34th annual Human Rights Report, and several countries in the former Soviet Union received less than sterling grades. The Report has become a very important resource for NGOs and sometimes an irritant to the countries under review. You can read the full report at [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/).

Washington continues to feel the repercussions of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's vote on a resolution (H.R. 252) to recognize the 1915 mass murder of Armenians as genocide. Turkey recalled its ambassador to the United States, and it may have a stronger response if the resolution reaches the full House for a vote. Unconfirmed reports claim that the Obama administration has worked out an agreement with Congressional leadership to prevent this from happening.

If you have time to read only a few stories in the update this week, do not miss the articles on Mikhail Gorbachev's legacy and "Operation Exodus." It was 25 years ago yesterday that Gorbachev came to power and helped to end the Cold War. The articles present a fascinating look at what has happened over these many years since.

Twenty years ago, when the emigration gates were flung open, our community undertook a massive effort to help Israel absorb the hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews who finally gained their freedom. This effort became known as "Operation Exodus." If the aliyah of more than one million Soviet Jews is a miracle, then certainly the Herculean effort to ensure their safe passage and transition in Israel is another one. A series of commemorative events are anticipated throughout 2010 to mark this modern miracle.

From the Chicago Jewish United Fund magazine, we've included two "Operation Exodus" stories that give a wonderful retrospective on what happened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For those who were part of this success, it's a terrific trip down memory lane. For those who are learning about "Operation Exodus" for the first time, it reminds us of what the organized American Jewish community can accomplish, particularly the Federation system, when we are united and determined. This is a lesson for all of us as we continue to confront the many challenges facing our community and our country.

Sincerely,

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

Mark B. Levin  
Executive Director



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

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Washington, D.C. March 12, 2010

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**#1a**

**Jewish Kindergarten Expands in Omsk  
FJC, March 7, 2010**

OMSK, Russia – In the west Siberian city of Omsk, the Chaya Mushka Kindergarten has opened a new group for children. On its first day of operation, parents came to spend a few hours with their children at the kindergarten, where Chief Rabbi of Omsk Osher Krichevsky spoke to them. "Thank you for entrusting us with what is most precious to you - your children. We are very pleased to welcome them here."

The Chaya Mushka Kindergarten, which recently celebrated its sixth anniversary, is housed in the same beautiful modern building as the Ohr Avner Chabad Day School which has 110 students. The kindergarten occupies a separate wing of the building and is comprised of four groups. Outside, the youngsters enjoy a well-equipped and

safe playground. Inside, the children benefit from the best pre-school education the city has to offer, in addition to modern equipment and safe conditions for the children to learn and feel comfortable in.

Rabbi Krichevsky expressed gratitude for the ongoing assistance and support of FJC President Lev Leviev and to Mikhail Mirilashvili, founder and president of the Mirilashvili Foundation. He also thanked Gennady Friedman, the chairman of the Jewish community of Omsk and other sponsors of the Jewish school. The support of all of these individuals has enabled the school to develop and accept new students, as well as to introduce new programs.

Rabbi Krichevsky wished success and well-being to everyone present and expressed hope that the youngsters would be happy at their new kindergarten. Irina Zeitlin, the head of the pre-school department, showed the newcomers into their classroom and introduced them to their new teacher and nanny.

**#1b**  
**Moscow Gears Up for Passover**  
**FJC, March 9, 2010**

MOSCOW, Russia – A month before Passover, the Jewish community of Moscow has begun to prepare for the holiday. When pedestrians and drivers pass through the central thoroughfares of the Russian capital, they will see huge billboards posted in various places, depicting a Jewish boy with a piece of matzah in his hand. The poster invites Jews of Moscow to acquire matzah for the holiday.

The organizer of this impressive campaign in Moscow is Mordechai Weisberg, the director of the Moscow Jewish Community Center, located in the Marina Roscha neighborhood of Moscow.

The Shaarei Tsedek Charity Center is active in this project, particularly in assuring that matzah and holiday food packages reach the elderly and needy in advance of the holiday. For several days already, people have been arriving at the Charity Center to receive the food packages and matzah that is integral to the celebration of the Passover holiday.

**#1c**  
**Renowned Moscow rabbi becomes Russian citizen**  
**Interfax, March 9, 2010**

Moscow, March 9, Interfax – Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree on giving Russian citizenship to a Swiss native, Rabbi of the Moscow Grand Choral Synagogue Philippe (Pinchas) Goldschmidt.

The corresponding decree was published at the official website of the Russian President late last week.

Goldschmidt was born in Zurich in 1963 and received traditional Jewish education in two renowned yeshivas in Israel and in the USA. He also graduated from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore with a Master's degree.

Goldschmidt is the chairman of the Conference of European Rabbis, a founder of the Russian Jewish Congress and the Congress of the Jewish religious organizations and associations of Russia.

**#1d**  
**'Ukrainian Only' School In Crimea In High Demand**  
**RFE/RL, March 10, 2010**

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine -- The only school in Simferopol where all subjects are taught in Ukrainian is seeking to offer new classes to meet high demand, RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service reports.

Crimea is a predominantly Russian-speaking part of eastern Ukraine. The Simferopol Ukrainian Gymnasium was established in the Crimean capital in 1997 on the model of a European high school, based on 11 grades, and has more than 800 students.

It began accepting applications for the 2010-2011 academic year on March 6 and in one day had more prospective students than seats in its classrooms.

The Simferopol Board of Education has thus far allowed the school to have only two classes of 30 first-grade students every year. The school has asked for an additional 30 slots for first-graders due to the increased demand.

"This is really a referendum on Ukrainian education in a Ukrainian environment," school principal Natalia Rudenko told RFE/RL, adding that "people are voting [on the language issue] with their feet."

Rudenko said the best way to satisfy the demand for Ukrainian-language schools in Simferopol would be to open such schools in each of the city's three districts.

But Irina Shykhorieva, the director of the Simferopol Board of Education, said that Ukrainian-language education needs are being satisfied by Ukrainian-language classes taught in mainly Russian-language schools on an "as-needed" basis.

The school's administration told RFE/RL that the majority of the students do not come from ethnic Ukrainian families but are mostly from Russian, Tatar, or ethnically mixed backgrounds. Many of the students are from wealthy families.

Rudenko said the admissions process will continue until September 1. She said they might even ask the city's Board of Education for permission to put together a fourth first-grade class of 30 students.

**#1e**

## **Uncharted Waters Of The Holocaust In The Soviet Union**

**By Nikola Krastev**

**RFE/RL, March 10, 2010**

The American Forum of Russian Jewry, with the help of the Russian Mission to the UN, launched on March 9 at the UN headquarters in New York the "Encyclopedia of the Holocaust on the Territory of the USSR."

The weighty volume containing 1,142 pages and thousands of entries has been in the making for seven years. Ilya Altman, the encyclopedia's editor in chief, said that it has been printed only in Russian so far but there is an English edition in the pipeline and an electronic version in the making.

"There are thousands of books dedicated to the Holocaust," Altman said. "This volume does not repeat them, it makes its own significant contribution."

Among the new entries, Altman said, is the list of all the places in the Soviet Union where 100 or more Jews lost their lives during World War II. Another novelty is the extensive use within the encyclopedia of personal testimonies. The accuracy of such source material is not always 100 percent established, Altman said, but nevertheless they felt compelled to include them.

Another segment in the encyclopedia, which has received scant attention in the past, is Jews in the Red Army. There were thousands of Jews, Altman said, who served as soldiers, officers, translators, engineers, and physicians.

The encyclopedia also details the suppression of the Holocaust by the Soviet authorities after the end of World War II and the difficulties Jews had in the Soviet Union erecting monuments to the victims.

Holocaust history in the Soviet Union has received less attention than in other European countries, even though half of the 6 million Jews killed lost their lives on the territory of the Soviet Union.

More than 100 authors from 12 former Soviet republics took part in the project, the majority of them from Russia and the Baltic states.

**#1f**

### **Moldovan Communists To Boycott Parliament**

**RFE/RL, March 11, 2010**

CHISINAU – Members of Moldova's Communist Party have announced that they will boycott all upcoming sessions of parliament, RFE/RL's Moldovan Service reports.

In an official statement, the Communist Party said the boycott was to protest the ruling Alliance for European Integration taking an "unconstitutional" action by holding a referendum on whether to amend or perhaps even replace the current constitution.

The Communists, who ruled Moldova for eight years until 2009, are themselves calling for a national referendum to be held to gauge the public's trust in the current government.

Members of the ruling coalition are seeking to change the constitution so that the president would be elected directly by voters and not by the parliament, which failed twice last year to elect a new president.

A further such failure would necessitate holding new parliamentary elections, which the ruling coalition wants to avoid.

**#2**

### **Turkey Criticizes House Committee Vote on Armenian Killings**

**By Sebnem Arsu and Sabrina Tavernise**

**New York Times, March 5, 2010**

ISTANBUL — Turkey's foreign minister said Friday that the vote by a Congressional committee in Washington condemning the mass killing of Armenians early in the last century as genocide would damage ties with the Obama administration and set back reconciliation efforts between Turkey and Armenia.

At least twice before, the House Foreign Affairs Committee has passed similar resolutions, but that was before Turkey and Armenia were in the midst of an internationally mediated reconciliation process.

"Each interference by a third party will make this normalization impossible," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said at a televised news conference. "If an adviser had whispered 'no' instead of 'yes' in the ear of a member of the House of Representatives, the vote would have come out differently. Can history be treated in such an unserious manner?"

The vote on the nonbinding resolution on Thursday was 23 to 22.

In recent years, Turkey has sought to play a bigger regional role, re-establishing ties with nearby Arab countries and reaching out to Armenia, whose border with Turkey has been closed since the 1990s, when Armenia was at war with its neighbor Azerbaijan, a Turkish ally. In 2008, Turkey's president paid the first visit by a Turkish leader to Armenia in the two nations' history.

The attempts at normalization began last October with a series of agreements, whose signing was blessed by the Obama administration and attended by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Hard-line Turkish nationalists strongly oppose the rapprochement, and analysts in Turkey said the additional pressure from the United States in the form of the vote would make proceeding more difficult for the Turkish government.

“It’s a big blow to the process,” said Yavuz Baydar, a columnist with the English-language newspaper Today’s Zaman. “This means it will drag on for at least another year.”

At the same time, he said, Turkey has been slow to move forward in the agreements with Armenia, causing the process to idle even before the committee vote.

The resolution is less likely to hurt relations with the United States unless it is brought to the floor and passed by the full House, which is improbable, analysts say.

In 2007, the Bush administration, fearful of losing Turkish cooperation on Iraq, lobbied forcefully to keep the resolution from reaching the House floor.

The Obama administration had urged the committee to forgo a vote. Democratic officials said Friday that there were no immediate plans to bring up the resolution for a vote in the House; however, if backers show they can produce the votes to pass it, it could eventually be put on the floor.

Turkish analysts have expressed concern that newly strained Israeli-Turkish relations would hurt their country’s case among Israel’s allies in the House during wrangling over whether to move the resolution forward.

But Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said that he believed the fears were misplaced and that a more salient factor in halting the resolution might instead be Turkey’s throwing its support behind new sanctions on Iran that are being pushed by the United States.

After the vote on Thursday, Turkey reacted sharply, recalling its ambassador, Namik Tan, from Washington for consultations.

Turkey’s newspapers featured the news of the vote — and of Turkey’s diplomatic response — on their front pages.

“We called the ambassador back,” proclaimed Hurriyet, the largest-circulation newspaper. “A vote crisis with the United States,” Milliyet, another daily, said. “A vote like a comedy,” read the headline in the newspaper Sabah.

Historians say as many as 1.5 million Armenians died in a forced migration by the Ottoman Turks during World War I. Turkey denies that this was a planned genocide, and the topic had long been taboo in Turkey, with no mention of it in history books. Writers and intellectuals, including the Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, have faced criminal charges for airing the debate.

But in recent years, Turkish intellectuals had made some progress at pushing the issue into the public debate. Ethnic Armenians in Turkey fear that passage of the resolution by the full House — which would be unprecedented — would seriously harm those efforts.

Mr. Davutoglu, the foreign minister, criticized the Obama administration for its efforts to halt Thursday’s vote, saying it had not adequately explained the strength of cooperation between Turkey and the United States, NATO partners. He said that lacking more effective efforts, “the picture ahead will not be a positive one.”

Some Turkish analysts said Ankara might put up diplomatic obstacles to Washington’s broader regional policies, but it seemed unlikely that Turkey would respond strongly unless the resolution won broader House support.

“On one side of the scale, there is the Congress under the influence of ethnic lobby groups, and on the other, there are the greater United States’ interests in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Caucasus,” said Sedat Ergin, a foreign policy analyst at the newspaper Hurriyet. “It is up to the American administration to come up with the best choice between the two.”

### **#3 Tajikistan's flawed election Change you can't believe in**

## **Economist, March 4, 2010**

A rigged vote keeps the ruling party in power in a failing state

TO THE surprise of no one, the governing People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections on February 28th, with almost 72% of the vote. Nor was anybody taken aback by the myriad irregularities on election day. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which monitored the polling, said it "failed to meet many key OSCE commitments". It noted a high prevalence of family- and proxy-voting and cases of ballot-box stuffing.

Preliminary results give the PDPT, led by Emomali Rakhmon, the president, 53 seats out of 63 in the lower house of parliament. The Islamic Revival Party, Central Asia's only religiously based party, came second, with 7.7% of the vote and two seats. The party's leadership, which expected to win around 30% of the vote, has cried foul, and plans to sue the election board.

The PDPT in fact lost four seats. But the vote reinforces the stronghold the president, in power for nearly two decades, has over the mountainous country. This is its misfortune. Among other gloomy analysts, the International Crisis Group, a think-tank, has depicted Tajikistan as on its way to becoming a failed state.

About 70% of its 7.3m people live in abject poverty in the countryside. It has still not fully recovered from a vicious five-year civil war that ended in 1997. The economy relies on exports of cotton and aluminium, and especially on remittances from more than 1m migrant labourers, mostly toiling in Russia and Kazakhstan. The World Bank estimates their contribution in 2008 as \$2.3 billion, or 46% of GDP. Last year, amid the global economic downturn, remittances fell by around 30%.

The exodus of mostly young and enterprising Tajiks provides Mr Rakhmon with a political safety-valve, and helps shield his regime from political unrest. But it has wreaked havoc on traditional family life, with women and old people left behind to fend for themselves. Young women often have difficulties finding a partner and may, out of necessity, agree to become a man's second or third wife. This is prohibited by Tajikistan's secular laws, but acceptable in Muslim practice. Others get divorced by husbands who stay away for years and start new families abroad. These women then have to raise their fatherless children and struggle to make ends meet, sometimes by going abroad themselves.

Tajikistan has also for years had fraught relations with its larger neighbour, Uzbekistan. One of the main sources of acrimony is Tajikistan's long-planned construction of a dam and hydroelectric power-plant, which will provide a much-needed supply of steady electricity. Uzbekistan worries it will limit the amount of water it receives from Tajikistan for irrigation.

Western observers, in turn, fret about the country's 1,300km (830 mile) southern border with Afghanistan. Much of it is lawless, giving rise to fears that conflict in Afghanistan might spread, bringing extremism and chaos. Increased fighting in northern Afghanistan has caused ethnic Tajiks there to seek refuge in Tajikistan. Taliban fighters might do the same. Moreover, Tajikistan continues to be an important transit country for drugs en route to Russia and Europe.

Concerned about all this, America wants closer ties with Tajikistan. Visiting Dushanbe, the capital, in February, Richard Holbrooke, Barack Obama's "AfPak" envoy, said that Tajikistan held "immense importance" to a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan. Worries about the deeply flawed election and its outcome, which did little to encourage hopes for stability and progress in Tajikistan, extend far beyond the country's borders.

## **#4**

### **A Nascent Anti-Putin Movement Gains Confidence in Russia**

**By Simon Shuster**

**Time.com, March 7, 2010**

Russia's opposition has long been fond of the word "de-Putinization," which to those who dream of such things is a different way of saying "progress." It reflects the rather starry-eyed belief that if Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his circle fall from grace, change will come immediately and Russia will morph into Europe. For years the opposition movement's strategy has been to rub away at Putin's credibility "like drops of water on a cinderblock," as one of its leading figures, Boris Nemtsov, puts it. For most of that time the impact of their work has fit this analogy. In the past few weeks, though, signs of something new have begun to emerge. Regular Russians, not just the usual crew of activists, have been coming out by the thousands to call for Putin to resign. De-Putinization, opposition figures say, has finally begun.

The pivotal point came on Jan. 30, when an opposition rally in the western city of Kaliningrad attracted 10,000 people, an incredibly high turnout for Russia's docile political culture, and likely the biggest protest for at least five years.

The people in Kaliningrad have a lot to be angry about. A hike in import duties has crushed one of the region's most vital industries: the importation of used cars from Europe that are then sold on in Russia. The end of that trade has put as many as 20,000 locals out of work. The price of utilities has jumped. And on top of that, the unpopular governor, a Kremlin-appointed former tax minister from Moscow named Georgy Boos levied a new tax on drivers. During the worst bout of unemployment and economic decline in a decade, reports of Boos' lavish vacations to Europe make many locals despise him.

For the opposition, this presents a great opportunity. Opposition leaders flew down from Moscow to have their turn at the podium during the late January protest. Alongside local activists, they called not only for lower taxes, more jobs and a new governor, but for an end to Putin's reign. Nemtsov was the most prominent figure to speak. A popular governor of Nizhny Novgorod in the 1990s and a deputy prime minister under President Boris Yeltsin, he took the stage in a bomber jacket and jeans. "Moscow is sucking the money from the regions as if they were its colonies," he said. "Until we oust this corrupt police state, we will never achieve a thing." There was a swell of applause, and he finished his speech with a famous quote from Alexander Pushkin, the nation's greatest poet. "Russia will waken from its slumber," he shouted. "And on the ruins of despotism, our names shall be inscribed!" The crowd went wild. The government became the enemy.

A few weeks later at his office in a Stalin-era high-rise in Moscow, Nemtsov is still beaming. A new strategy had come out of Kaliningrad, he says, and he seems restless to enact it. "We have to monitor the overall environment very carefully. We have to spot where protests are flaring up, and we have to act on that," he tells TIME. "At first it will be a mosaic. It will be fragmented...But eventually the whole country will catch on."

The ultimate goal, Nemtsov says, is to organize a rally ten times the size of Kaliningrad in the center of the capital. And then what? "Well, after that we'll have elections, and then we'll see who wins and who loses. But the point is we have to get rid of Putin. He is dangerous," Nemtsov says. "I think this year is going to be the year of anti-Putin protests."

He may be right. Demonstrations have cropped up around the country in the past few weeks. They have been smaller than in Kaliningrad but still very large by Russian standards. In the Siberian city of Irkutsk a protest on Feb. 13 attracted about 2000 people. In late 2008, just as the Russian economy was plunging, there was a protest of a few thousand people in Vladivostok and subsequent rallies that brought out a few hundred people. But the latest rallies are larger, the reasons behind them more diverse and the calls for Putin's resignation more fervent. The prime minister's popularity has started to suffer. In the week after Kaliningrad, Putin's approval ratings as measured by state run pollster, VTsIOM, fell to their lowest level in almost four years.

He remains, of course, the most popular politician in Russia by far, as well as the most powerful. But even the mainstream opposition sees an opening. Take the Yabloko Party. It had led the pro-Western forces in parliament throughout the 1990s before being voted out in 2007 in an election it says was rigged. Kaliningrad has helped turn its focus to the streets. "The outlying regions are in a better mood for protests," its leader, Sergei Mitrokhin tells TIME. "Kaliningrad shed light on all the vices of the current regime and its economic policies, and it has led us to activate our regional branches. We have been carrying out a series of protests and pickets around the country, and we will continue working in this direction."

The hurdles are many. Putin loyalists control Russia's political institutions as well as the entire bureaucracy. The government also controls all the major TV channels. The Kaliningrad protest got virtually no coverage in the mainstream Russian press. Putin has also been able to deflect part of the resentment by dressing down his political party, United Russia, and sending out envoys to show that the Kremlin is paying attention.

Meanwhile, the opposition remains deeply divided. Egos sometimes override their pragmatism, and a real alliance appears unthinkable. Since Kaliningrad, opposition leaders have gone back to denouncing each other. "There is a fear of competition between them," says Valeriya Novodvorskaya, a prominent Soviet dissident and a vocal critic of Putin's rule. First arrested by the KGB for her activism in 1969, Novodvorskaya is no stranger to the opposition, but she is wary of the latest flare-up in public resentment. "A street protest is not a grocery store," she says. "You go there to demand your freedom, not to ask for more sausage on your plate."

If the recent demonstrations do manage to topple the government, Novodvorskaya says it will likely be the Communists who seize power, or some other authoritarian force. Such parties are best placed, she says, to promise handouts and paternalism, the things that people want at a time of financial crisis. "We've played that bloody game with the Bolsheviks before, and the motives behind these protests are again material. These people don't want to hear about free market capitalism and European integration. These are foreign notions here, and they will support anyone still capable of throwing them a bone. Don't be confused. The government still has bones to throw."

Kaliningrad's transport tax, for instance, has been called off for this year, and Russia can afford it: the state is still reaping massive profits from the sale of oil and gas. The broader economy is also recovering, and even though Putin's initial reaction to the protests showed some signs of dismay, Mitrokhin is far from certain that the government is afraid. "It amazes me," he says. "People are screaming for him to get out but there is no sense that he is trying to reform or justify himself. He feels his own strength. If needed, he knows he can rig the next elections, or carry out such a massive PR campaign that the people will love him again... It's naive to think he will cave."

## **#5**

### **Russia does not view former Soviet Union as 'chessboard' - foreign minister ITAR-TASS, March 5, 2010**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has told a CIS economic forum that "attempts to portray historical relationships between the states in the area of the former Soviet Union in the light of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century-styled struggle for 'spheres of influence' is absurd", Russian state ITAR-TASS news agency reported on 5 March.

Said Lavrov: "We do not view this space as a chessboard to play geopolitical games. This is a civilization area common for all the peoples living there that keeps our historical and spiritual heritage."

"Integration processes in the Commonwealth (of Independent States) space are coming naturally and realize this great potential of joint responsibility for our common future," he added. "Development of bilateral and multi-directional cooperation with the member states of the Commonwealth is the absolute priority for Russia that is codified in the updated foreign policy conception approved by President Dmitriy Medvedev in July 2008. It cannot be any other way if we are talking about relations with friendly, close countries located on the perimeter of Russia's borders."

Lavrov said that "it would not be outrageous to demand that all external players coordinate their policy in the CIS space in order to maintain stability there," but added that "it would be hard for some as they will have to give up the ideological postulates and myths of the past and agree to a more carefully thought-out approach to the recent and more distant past".

Lavrov went on to say that "any geopolitical projects by external powers in our common space lead to destabilization as they replace pragmatism and common sense policy which takes real national interests into account".

He compared NATO enlargement and European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative to struggle for "spheres of influence" and expressed hope that "it will be conducted in a transparent manner, take the realities of the region into account and not contradict our countries' collective efforts on current social and economic development issues".

A later report by the same news agency quoted Lavrov as saying that the "model of multi-level and multi-speed integration that is established in the Commonwealth space and, correspondingly, a multitude of formats of integration require the development of rational formula for these relationships. It appears that they have to be complementary in character."

Lavrov stressed the need to join integration processes in different formats so as to prevent artificial borderlines in Europe and Eurasia. He added that this is particularly urgent since the European Union increased its activity in the CIS: "We expect our European partners to follow the existing agreements so that the integration processes in the various regions of Greater Europe would not be go in opposite directions."

Lavrov noted that the CIS and Eurasian Economic Community have played a role in countering the recent financial crisis and that development of integration could serve as insurance against possible new crises. Russia "approaches the integration pragmatically, thinking that it has to be built on the principles of mutual benefit," Lavrov said. "It is important for its main driving force to be real economic interests," he added.

## **#6**

### **New Ukraine leader soothes Russia, no gas deals**

**By Denis Dyomkin**

**Reuters, March 5, 2010**

MOSCOW – Ukraine's new president Viktor Yanukovich soothed Moscow Friday by suggesting he would reverse key policies of his pro-Western predecessor, but won no public promise that Russia will lower Kiev's onerous gas bills.

Making a state visit to Moscow a week after his inauguration, Yanukovich said his five-year presidency is a chance to "open a new page" in ties between the Slavic neighbors after half a decade of increasing acrimony.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said both leaders would "do everything" to put ties back on track.

"We are talking not about the development of relations but about their rebirth," he said.

Yanukovich suggested he would let Russia's Black Sea Fleet remain at its base in the Crimean peninsula port of Sevastopol after the current lease expires in 2017. Former President Viktor Yushchenko had stressed he wanted Russia out by the deadline.

Yanukovich also said he would scrap orders Yushchenko signed which elevated two World War II-era nationalists reviled by Russia to the status of "Heroes of Ukraine."

The decrees angered Ukraine's former imperial master Russia and increased its distaste for Yushchenko, who pushed his nation toward NATO and sought to shed Moscow's influence.

Despite Friday's warm talk, there were fewer signs of solidarity on the economic issues that will continue to dominate relations between energy giant Russia and Ukraine, a key export route for Russian oil and gas headed for Europe.

## **"POISONED CHALICE"**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin forged a long-term gas deal in 2009 with Yanukovich's election rival, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, removing preferential price treatment for Ukraine and bringing rates paid in line with the market.

Many analysts believe Kiev's desperate public finances mean Yanukovich must push for change in the long-term gas deal.

"He's inherited the proverbial poisoned chalice in the economy and will need to do deals with both Russia and the EU," said Chris Weafer, chief strategist at investment bank Uralsib.

But neither Medvedev nor Putin discussed the gas pricing with Yanukovich, Russian officials said. They suggested it would be addressed once Yanukovich forms a government in Ukraine.

Yanukovich's first foreign destination as president was Brussels, where he assured the European Union Monday that Ukraine will be a reliable gas transit route.

Europe, which gets a fifth of its gas needs from Russia via Ukraine, is hoping warmer Moscow-Kiev ties will prevent repeats of price disputes which have led to supply cuts to Europe.

The Kremlin Thursday said Ukraine should not seek to revise gas contracts. But Russian daily Kommersant reported on Friday that Ukraine will offer Moscow a one-third stake in the management of its gas pipelines in exchange for deep price cuts.

Ukraine's acting prime minister and Yanukovich rival Oleksander Turchinov, said giving Moscow any control over the pipelines would be "a betrayal of national interests."

Yanukovich has pleased Russia by making clear he opposes Ukraine joining NATO. But analysts have said Yanukovich would have to offer Moscow bigger incentives, such as a deal for the Black Sea Fleet to stay on, to win lower gas prices.

Yanukovich may also seek to convince Russia not to proceed with Nord Stream or South Stream, pipelines that would bypass Ukraine in delivering gas to Europe and cut Kiev's revenues.

At the Kremlin, Medvedev and Yanukovich signed a declaration vowing to boost economic ties "in every way possible."

But an exchange between Yanukovich and Putin underscored the limits. When Yanukovich said Ukraine wants "a sharp turn" in ties, Putin said curtly, "Join the customs union," referring to a trade group linking Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Ukraine is in the World Trade Organization and is unlikely to join the union.

**#7**

**Viktor Yanukovych to gain points from Bandera controversy – expert  
RIA Novosti, March 7, 2010**

KIEV -It will be easy for Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych to cancel his predecessor Viktor Yushchenko's January decree to award, amid much media hysteria, the honorary title of Hero of Ukraine to onetime Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, a Polish analyst said Sunday.

Warsaw University's Andrzej Szeptycki said the cancelation would bring Yanukovych additional points in the European Union and Russia and would make it possible for him to "annoy" Yushchenko.

Yanukovych, sworn in February 25 following the February 7 presidential election runoff that he narrowly won from then prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, said after Friday's talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow that the Bandera controversy would be settled before this year's Victory Day.

"This is a concession Yanukovych will find easy to make," Szeptycki was quoted by the Unian news agency as saying.

Yanukovych has a friendly attitude to Russia rather than Yushchenko whose pro-Western policies, including a bid to take Ukraine into NATO, saw a rapid deterioration in bilateral ties.

Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists briefly allied with Nazi Germany during the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities accused Bandera, who fought both the Nazis and the Soviets in his quest for an independent Ukraine, of numerous acts of murder and terrorism. He was assassinated by the KGB in Munich, Germany, on October 15, 1959.

In Ukraine Bandera is a controversial figure, with many in the more nationalist west of the country considering him a hero.

Yanukovych's position "shows that [Yushchenko] is no longer president," Szeptycki said, adding that Yanukovych is ready to sacrifice potential western Ukrainian support to the benefits he would have from good relations with the EU and Russia.

EU parliamentarians on February 25 condemned Yushchenko's decree and called on Yanukovych to revise the decision.

## **#8**

### **Turkmenistan: We don't want ex-Mossad man as ambassador**

**By Barak Ravid**

**Haaretz, March 3, 2010**

For four months now Turkmenistan has been delaying the ratification of the appointment of Reuven Dinel, a close associate of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, as Israel's first ambassador to that country. Sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have said this is an unusual diplomatic hint to the effect that Turkmenistan is not interested in the appointment, because Dinel formerly worked at the Mossad. "They are hoping we will get the hint and appoint someone else to the position," said a top person at the ministry.

At the end of July 2009, Lieberman announced his intention to appoint Dinel as Israel's ambassador to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. The foreign minister attributed particular importance to the appointment in light of the fact that it involves the opening of an embassy in a country that shares a long border with Iran. Lieberman believed this also entails sending a message to Tehran.

In 2003, in his capacity as minister of transportation, Lieberman appointed Dinel, who is considered close to the minister, to head the establishment of the Carmel port in Haifa. Currently Dinel serves as deputy director general for management resources at the Israel Ports Development and Assets Company.

Lieberman saw Dinel's appointment to Turkmenistan as a highlight of his first year as foreign minister, and pinned many hopes on Dinel and the abilities he would bring to the role of ambassador from his period of service in the Mossad.

On October 25, the government approved the appointment and a few days later, as is customary under diplomatic protocol, Israel send an official letter to Turkmenistan with the details about the new ambassador, together with a request to the government there to agree to the appointment.

The process of granting approval for an ambassador's appointment is technical and symbolic, and usually does not present any problem. However, Turkmenistan decided exceptionally not to approve the appointment. Nearly four months have passed since the Israeli request was sent, but the Turkmenistani government has not sent back any reply to Jerusalem concerning Dinel's appointment. The Turkmenistani government's conduct is causing the foreign minister serious embarrassment, in light of the great importance he has attributed to the appointment and the opening of the new embassy, which he has taken as a personal project.

The background to Turkmenistan's refusal to accept Dinel as Israel's ambassador may well lie in an embarrassing affair that has been following him since 1996, when he was serving as the first Mossad envoy to Moscow. That year Dinel was expelled from Russia after security agents in Moscow caught him receiving classified satellite photographs from Russian officers.

Sources at the Foreign Ministry assessed on Sunday that the Russians, who consider Dinel persona non grata, sent messages to the authorities in Turkmenistan indicating they expect that country not to give its agreement to the appointment.

"From the outset this appointment was very strange," said a senior source at the Foreign Ministry. "They took someone who is a declared espionage person, who had even been thrown out of Russia for that, and put him in Turkmenistan. They did all this without consulting any professional element. What did they expect would happen? There's no way he would get the approval of the Turkmenistani authorities."

The Foreign Minister's Bureau stated in response: "There has been a delay in the opening of the embassy in Turkmenistan because a number of difficulties have arisen, mostly with regard to security matters, as often happens when opening a new delegation. We hope it will be possible to arrange matters in the coming weeks."

## **#9**

### **Former Belarus envoy put on leave**

#### **Ben-Aryeh allegedly passed secret investigation materials to Lieberman.**

**By Yaakov Lappin and Herb Keinon**

**Jerusalem Post, March 3, 2010**

Israel's former ambassador to Belarus was put on unpaid leave on Wednesday afternoon in the wake of police accusations that he had passed secret investigation materials pertaining to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman on to the foreign minister in 2008.

Ze'ev Ben-Aryeh, who has been serving as the foreign minister's diplomatic adviser and was designated to be the next ambassador to Latvia and Lithuania, was sent on leave pending Civil Service Commission suspension proceedings. The move was agreed upon by the Foreign Ministry and the Civil Service Commission following a report of criminal misconduct received by the commission from the police.

Police say the envoy, who was supposed to pass the confidential dossier directly to Belarus authorities in order to request their cooperation on the matter, copied the documents and gave them to Lieberman while the latter was visiting the country. Lieberman's involvement in Ben Aryeh's promotion in the foreign service will also come under investigation.

On Wednesday evening, Ben-Aryeh denied that he had opened the confidential dossier with intent to pry.

Speaking to Channel 1, the former envoy stated in his defense that the envelope containing the document had not been sealed when it was given to him. As an Israeli diplomat, he said, he thought he had the security clearance to look through the material sent to him by the government before passing it on to security forces in Belarus.

"The envelope contained a letter addressed to me, and I couldn't pass it on without reading it," he said.

Ben-Aryeh did not acknowledge whether or not he had passed the information on to Lieberman, but hinted that the matter had been blown out of proportions. "I am under investigation and cannot discuss this issue," he told the news channel.

Earlier today, citing the "mother and father of all investigation disruptions," Avigdor Lieberman filed a temporary injunction to the High Court of Justice to force the attorney general, the state attorney and the Police Investigations Division to explain why an internal investigation of leaks in his criminal case had been closed.

On Tuesday, Lieberman was questioned by police on suspicion of having received an illegal tip-off from Ben Aryeh in 2008, allowing him to subvert the investigation process under way at that time.

In August 2009, police said enough evidence existed to charge Lieberman for taking bribes, fraudulently receiving goods, violating public office, obstructing justice, harassing witnesses and laundering millions of shekels using a host of shell companies and bank accounts.

In response to questions outside the High Court today, Lieberman told reporters that he had no intention of stepping down, and expected to serve as foreign minister through the 2012 elections and beyond that.

## **#10**

### **The Blooming Friendship Between Azerbaijan And Israel**

**By Anna Zamejc**

**RFE/RL, March 9, 2010**

When 13 years ago the late Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev received Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Baku, it was considered a bold and politically risky decision. No red carpets were rolled out, and the meeting was purposely kept low-key.

Today, however, no such precautions are needed, as visits of Israeli leaders to Azerbaijan are no longer matters of domestic controversy. However, the peculiar relationship of the two countries continues to elude easy characterizations. Some external observers see it as a typical marriage of convenience, while others tend to take it as an alarming threat.

Although Azerbaijan is a predominantly Shi'ite Muslim country and a majority of ethnic Azeris live in neighboring Iran (a ferocious enemy of Israel), Baku routinely shares intelligence with the Jewish state, buys its arms, and considers it trustworthy in security matters, completely contradicting stereotypes about a "clash of civilizations."

Further, the informal alliance seems to undermine the geopolitical game that the strongest actors -- Russia and Iran -- are determined to play in the region.

Given how advanced bilateral relations are and how strong the mutual trust appears, it might sound surprising that 18 years of diplomatic contacts have not produced a single official treaty between Israel and Azerbaijan. Moreover, Azerbaijani authorities remain vague to this day about the widely anticipated potential opening of an embassy in Israel.

Why? The answer can be found in Iran.

#### **Thorn In The Side**

"Today, everyone understands why Iran wants to block the Azerbaijani-Israeli rapprochement by any means," Baku-born former Knesset member Yosef Shagal, a major champion of Israeli-Azerbaijani ties, said in an interview with RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service. "It is one of the most important strategic priorities of the Islamic republic. Tehran is perfectly aware of the following: the stronger the connection between Baku and Jerusalem, the more weakened Iran will be."

Iran, which aspires to be a regional leader, would like to see Azerbaijan play by its rules. But Azerbaijan, whose secular system is a thorn in the side of the Islamic regime, not only refuses to conform to Tehran's dictates but has also crossed a red line by befriending the sworn enemy of Iran's president.

Azerbaijan has always felt threatened and continues to feel threatened [by Iran] from an ideological, economic, and political point of view.

"Very characteristic in this regard is the reaction of Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the official visit of Israeli President Shimon Peres to Azerbaijan in...2009. In hysterical tones, the Iranian leader demanded that the leadership of Azerbaijan immediately cancel the visit of 'the head of the Zionist entity' and 'the main enemy of

Muslims," Shagal recalls, adding that all Tehran's efforts proved counterproductive as Peres was received in Azerbaijan with the highest honors.

"It is worth noting the dignity and tact with which Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev recommended that his Iranian counterpart refrain from giving advice to a leader of a sovereign state on to whom to show hospitality and to whom to refuse it," he added.

Although Iran may not be in a position to keep Israel and Azerbaijan completely apart, it has been successful in one respect: Despite numerous calls from the Jewish state, Azerbaijan has still not opened an embassy in Israel because of pressure from Tehran.

This creates a sort of diplomatic asymmetry as it has been 16 years since Israel established its embassy in Azerbaijan. However, Baku has thus far been reluctant to reciprocate. The advanced contacts with Israel have already put a grave chill on Baku's relations with Tehran, and provoking Iran with an embassy in Israel could prove too costly for Azerbaijan, even triggering a backlash from other Muslim states.

"Repeated efforts by Baku to find out how its southern neighbor would react to opening an Azerbaijani Embassy in Israel have always encountered Iranian ultimatums," Shagal says, stressing that it would not only be Iranian-Azerbaijani relations that would suffer a massive blow, but Baku would eventually have to pay the price in the area that is of vital importance for the Caucasus republic: Nagorno-Karabakh.

"If Azerbaijan opens an embassy in Israel, then Iran will declare on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) a refusal to support Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia, and would also disavow all the efforts of Azerbaijan and its supporters in the OIC for the restoration of its territorial integrity and the return of Nagorno-Karabakh," Shagal says.

#### Influence Stability

Alexander Murinson, an independent researcher and academic writer who follows developments in Israeli-Azerbaijani relations, is also afraid that Baku could face difficulties once it decides to open the embassy.

"Iran can cause trouble for authorities in Azerbaijan and influence the stability of the country. So obviously that's another way of Iran trying to influence the diplomatic relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan," Murinson says.

"Azerbaijan has always felt threatened and continues to feel threatened [by Iran] from an ideological, economic, and political point of view. Iran obviously has a religious network in Azerbaijan that could undermine the secular nature of the current regime in Azerbaijan," Murinson adds.

Despite those dangers, the IzRus portal reported last month, quoting Israel's ambassador to Azerbaijan, Michael Lavon-Lotem, that Baku will soon open an embassy in Tel Aviv. Murinson warns that this might be mere posturing, like a similar announcement in 2006. But he believes that this time it could be for real.

"That development has been expected for many years, because the relationship is thriving both in terms of economic trade ties and also in the military field," Murinson says. "It might be an indication that some agreement has been reached on very deep strategic cooperation between the two parties that may not have been publicized."

A potential embassy would certainly be a culmination of Israel's long-term efforts to persuade Baku to formalize relations and could boost Israel's position abroad.

"For Israel, which is now faced by tremendous diplomatic pressure around the globe for many reasons, when a Muslim country, especially a Shi'ite country, makes this kind of announcement, it indicates for Israel that it has a friend in the region. In such an environment, Azerbaijan making this diplomatic move [would] create a very important, positive dynamic for the state of Israel," Murinson says.

#### What's In It For Baku?

Aran Amnon, an expert on the Middle East who lectures at City University in London, adds that Israel might be now particularly interested in strengthening ties with Baku as the threat of Iranian nuclear capacity takes center stage in Israeli foreign policy.

"Israel has an interest in trying to improve its standing with as many countries as possible, especially those who may be directly affected by Iran and might be persuaded to be supportive of Israeli efforts," Amnon says.

But in international relations, every nation acts on its own interests. The gains seem obvious for Israel, but why should Baku be willing to take the risk? Murinson links the potential switch to the new dynamics that were created by Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and the deteriorating relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv.

In fact, Baku has a lot of other reasons for being interested in deepening ties with Israel. Israel is an important source of military equipment, and reportedly it was Israel who helped Baku rebuild its army after the heavy losses it suffered during the war over Nagorno-Karabakh. The military aspect of the relationship has been present ever since.

"During the visit of Simon Peres, a very important contract was signed which included construction of a plant in Azerbaijan that would produce unmanned aerial vehicles. By doing so, Azerbaijan would become an important producer of very advanced systems in the region -- even Russia doesn't have advanced unmanned aerial vehicles," Murinson says, stressing that the lack of such systems proved problematic during the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

Israel plays an important role in Azerbaijani security arrangements. The electronic fence around Baku's international airport was built by Israeli companies. Reportedly, Israeli firms are supplying equipment to ensure the safety of Azerbaijan's energy infrastructure, and there were also rumors that Israelis provide security for Azerbaijan's president on his foreign visits.

Last but not least, Azerbaijan is the home of an ancient Jewish community, which remains an important aspect in mutual contacts.

"We estimate that there are approximately 25,000 Jews living in Azerbaijan," Mark Levin, the executive director of National Conference of the Soviet Jewry says. "Azeri Jews have lived side by side with their non-Jewish neighbors for centuries, and they are treated very well."

## **#11**

### **Regional governors enjoy more freedom with Medvedev**

**By Nicholas Krlev, diplomatic correspondent**

**Washington Times, March 9, 2010**

Russia's Kremlin-appointed regional governors have enjoyed more freedom since President Dmitry Medvedev took office in 2008, though they could flex even more muscle if they were better organized, one of the governors said last week.

Valery Shantsev, who has led the Nizhny Novgorod region for four years, called during a visit to Washington for the formation of an organization similar to the U.S. National Governors Association.

"No one has proposed it yet, but it would be very useful," he said in an interview. "An association would serve many purposes. For example, newly elected governors could be trained to make sure they understand their responsibilities."

All governors are members of Russia's State Council, an advisory body to the president. However, an association would enable them to cooperate and solve mutual problems without having to go through Moscow, as well as to defend their interests, Mr. Shantsev said.

He said he has felt no significant political pressure from the Kremlin under Mr. Medvedev, who does not try to dictate to governors how to do their job.

"Every one of us is a free agent. No one coordinates or supervises us," Mr. Shantsev said.

The ruling style of Mr. Medvedev's predecessor, Vladimir Putin, was widely criticized in the West as authoritarian, and the George W. Bush administration repeatedly accused him of "backsliding" on democracy. One of the administration's complaints was that he did not give governors enough autonomy.

Mr. Putin is still in the Kremlin as prime minister, and many diplomats and observers say his influence is as strong as it was when he held the presidency. So he could interfere if he wanted to, but there are outside factors that would make that difficult, analysts said.

"Russia's dramatic economic decline in the wake of the global financial crisis places more constraints on Moscow's capacity to buy off political and economic influence in Russia's regions," said Andrew C. Kuchins, director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Nizhny Novgorod is one of 83 regions and other areas known as federal subjects of Russia. With its 3.5 million people and about 158 square miles, it is by no means among the largest. However, it is politically important because of its proximity to Moscow.

In the early 1990s, the governorship of Nizhny Novgorod launched the national career of one of Russia's youngest and most famous politicians, Boris Nemtsov, who later became deputy prime minister in Moscow under former President Boris Yeltsin. Mr. Nemtsov was just 32 when he became governor and won praise from former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Mr. Shantsev said that even though he has good relations with the Kremlin, his administration is not afraid to take on federal authorities if it disagrees with their actions in the region.

"Our [regional] laws have the same status as federal laws, and [officials in Moscow] are subject to our laws just like anybody else. Such issues come up often, and we sue them, and we win in court," he said.

"For example, at one point, we worked on a project to provide free distribution of medicines, and a certain company won the tender," he said, though he declined to name the Russian company. "At that point, the federal anti-monopoly agency stepped in, banned them from working and announced the tender was illegal. We sued, went all the way up to the highest court of appeals and won the case."

Direct elections for regional parliaments in Russia are held every five years. The majority-winning party proposes three candidates for governor to the president, and he makes his choice, which then has to be approved formally by the legislature, Mr. Shantsev said.

The main purpose of his trip to the United States was to promote investment in his region and learn from the economic and business experience of U.S. states. He visited Annapolis last week and agreed to cooperate with Maryland in the future.

He said one of the main hurdles to attracting foreign investors to Nizhny Novgorod is the very poor condition of the only international airport in the region - in the city with the same name. Germany's Lufthansa is the only Western airline currently operating flights there.

Mr. Shantsev said he plans to put a significant effort into modernizing the airport and predicted seven times more passengers in 2014 compared to last year's 300,000.

## **#12**

### **Delay on Arms Pact Slows Reset of U.S.- Russia Ties By Peter Baker and Mark Landler**

**New York Times, March 9, 2010**

WASHINGTON — When President Obama got on the telephone with President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia last month, he was under the impression that they were finally close to wrapping up a long-delayed arms control treaty that he had originally expected to sign in December.

But to Mr. Obama's surprise, Mr. Medvedev was not ready to sign off on a deal and raised issues that required more discussion, American officials said. As he hung up, the officials said, a frustrated Mr. Obama realized that the two sides were not as close as he had thought and sent negotiators back to the table.

The fitful effort to fashion a treaty that would be a signature achievement of his presidency has demonstrated the hurdles Mr. Obama faces in his drive to reset relations with Russia after years of tension.

After months of delay and discord, administration officials said, they have learned that when it comes to deal-making with Moscow, nothing is done until it is done, and rarely will it go as smoothly as anticipated.

Negotiators are making a fresh effort this week to break the logjam and finish by the end of the month, so they can showcase the new treaty at an international summit meeting on nuclear nonproliferation that Mr. Obama will host in Washington in April. Underscoring his determination to seal the deal, he sent Ellen Tauscher, the under secretary of state for arms control, to Geneva to help resolve remaining differences, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton plans to travel to Moscow next week.

Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, predicted Tuesday that the treaty could be finished by the end of the month. "We would push for a conclusion in two to three weeks," Mr. Lavrov said, according to Russian news agencies. "For this, there is every chance."

The White House also expressed cautious optimism as negotiators went back to work in Geneva. "They are working on the last few remaining issues to a new treaty," said Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary. "We are certainly hopeful that that can get done in short order."

But Mr. Gibbs added that the administration would not rush a bad deal just to get it done before the summit meeting, scheduled for April 12-13. "If it takes, quite frankly, many more weeks past April to get something that we believe is in our best interest," he said, then the United States would take the extra time.

The arms control treaty is part of a complicated diplomatic effort to forge a new relationship with Russia, interlinked with issues like Iran, missile defense and Afghanistan. Mr. Obama had hoped to restore ties with some relatively easier deals that could lead to more trust and deeper cooperation in areas that have long divided the former adversaries.

But even the supposedly easy agreements have been hard. The new arms pact was supposed to be a relatively straightforward replacement of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty of 1991, known as Start. The administration hoped that a successful negotiation would be a catalyst to a broader and more ambitious round of disarmament talks. Yet when the Start treaty expired in December, the new treaty was still not ready.

"This is a marginal no-brainer, and it takes forever and will be a semidifficult ratification fight," said George Perkovich, a specialist on nonproliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a research institute in Washington. "This is complicated stuff."

Some administration officials said both sides had been overly optimistic about how quickly they could transform a relationship that had more baggage than they initially figured. "It's hard for us to learn how to dance together again," said a senior administration official, who like others was not authorized to speak on the record in the middle of a delicate negotiation.

The American officials said the answer might be persistence and patience. One example is an agreement that Mr. Obama and Mr. Medvedev reached in Moscow in July to allow American troops and weapons to fly through Russian airspace en route to Afghanistan. Months later, virtually no flights had flown amid bureaucratic delays.

In the past few months, though, the planes have begun crossing Russian territory — about 100 so far, according to two American officials, roughly one or two a day. The idea of American military units' flying through Russia represents a symbolic milestone for countries that spent four decades preparing to go to war against each other.

Likewise, the White House expresses confidence that it will have Russian support on a United Nations resolution imposing new sanctions against Iran for not halting its uranium enrichment program. Moscow has supported three such resolutions in the past, but always after making sure they did not have as much bite as the Americans wanted. This time, administration officials said, the Russians are willing to take tougher measures.

The new treaty remains the elusive target that Mr. Obama hopes will unlock more cooperation. The draft treaty, under 20 pages, has been essentially ready for months. Negotiators are working on the longer protocol that will accompany it, 100 to 150 pages spelling out the details. The treaty will reduce deployed strategic warheads and delivery systems by at least one-quarter.

But issues like missile defense and the sharing of telemetry keep coming up. The announcement in January that Romania will host part of Mr. Obama's reconfigured antimissile system angered Moscow, which then tried to reintroduce the topic into the negotiations, seeking limits on American plans.

In the end, the treaty is likely to include a statement in the preamble noting the relationship between offensive and defensive arms, a way of assuaging Russian concerns without agreeing to binding limits, officials said.

The long delays have prompted second guessing within the administration about how it has handled the Russians, creating friction between the White House and the State Department, and even within the State Department, officials said.

Part of what has held the treaty up, said Mr. Perkovich, the nonproliferation specialist, is a calculation by both sides about how much they can get. Does Moscow want the treaty most because it has to cut its arsenal anyway for economic reasons? Does Mr. Obama want it most because he wants momentum heading into next month's meeting?

"It's a contest of who needs it most," Mr. Perkovich said.

### **#13 Washington wants to see Russia as WTO partner - official ITAR-TASS, March 10, 2010**

WASHINGTON - The United States would like to see Russia as a partner in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and has noted good progress in the settlement of this issue, United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk said in Washington on Tuesday.

Answering a question if any clarity has appeared in the process of Russia's admission to the WTO Kirk said that active discussions are currently underway on the issue of Russia's admission in an alliance with Kazakhstan and Belarus.

He said the US has made very good progress in assisting the RF in overcoming the last difficulties on the way to the WTO and it continues the dialogue with Russia.

Kirk stressed at the same time that the United States and American business are interested in Russia's becoming part of the international trade community.

A country wishing to accede to the WTO submits an application to the General Council, and has to describe all aspects of its trade and economic policies that have a bearing on WTO agreements. The application is submitted to the WTO in a memorandum which is examined by a working party open to all interested WTO Members.

After all necessary background information has been acquired, the working party focuses on issues of discrepancy between the WTO rules and the applicant's international and domestic trade policies and laws. The working party determines the terms and conditions of entry into the WTO for the applicant nation, and may consider transitional periods to allow countries some leeway in complying with the WTO rules.

The final phase of accession involves bilateral negotiations between the applicant nation and other working party members regarding the concessions and commitments on tariff levels and market access for goods and services. The new member's commitments are to apply equally to all WTO members under normal non-discrimination rules, even though they are negotiated bilaterally.

When the bilateral talks conclude, the working party sends to the general council or ministerial conference an accession package, which includes a summary of all the working party meetings, the Protocol of Accession (a draft membership treaty), and lists ("schedules") of the member-to-be's commitments. Once the general council or ministerial conference approves of the terms of accession, the applicant's parliament must ratify the Protocol of Accession before it can become a member.

The WTO has 153 members (almost all of the 123 nations participating in the Uruguay Round signed on at its foundation, and the rest had to get membership). The 27 states of the European Union are represented also as the European Communities. WTO members do not have to be full sovereign nation-members. Instead, they must be a customs territory with full autonomy in the conduct of their external commercial relations. Thus Hong Kong (as "Hong Kong, China" since 1997) became a GATT contracting party, and the Republic of China (ROC) (commonly known as Taiwan, whose sovereignty has been disputed by the People's Republic of China or PRC) acceded to the WTO in 2002 under the name of "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu" (Chinese Taipei).

A number of non-members (30) are observers at WTO proceedings and are currently negotiating their membership. As observers, Iran, Iraq and Russia are not yet members. With the exception of the Holy See, observers must start accession negotiations within five years of becoming observers. Some international intergovernmental organizations are also granted observer status to WTO bodies. 14 states and 2 territories so far have no official interaction with the WTO.

Chairman of the international affairs committee of the Russian State Duma lower house of parliament Konstantin Kosachev said earlier that that Russia "has almost reached the final point" at talks on admission to the World Trade Organisation, however, they later "faded," in essence. The United States is largely responsible for this, said the lawmaker calling on the local business and political circles to assist the completion of the process of Russia's entry in the WTO. Kosachev also stated that Russia will be actively attracting the American experience for the modernisation of its own economy. Separately dwelling on the problems of the notorious Jackson-Vanick amendment, he said that at present "it plays no practical role." Cancelling this amendment "is a problem of our American colleagues," the RF parliamentarian stated.

Russia has been in negotiations to join the WTO for over 16 years, and is the only major world economy not to have joined. Several former Soviet countries, and communist states such as China and Cuba, are already WTO members. Last December, Russian presidential aide Arkady Dvorkovich said Russia expected to complete negotiations on its accession to the WTO in 2010.

In June 2009, the governments of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus notified the WTO of their intention to join the World Trade Organisation as a customs union. The three ex-Soviet republics suspended their bilateral negotiations on WTO entry to hold consultations on a common position on the customs union. In October 2009, Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus announced they would resume talks on WTO accession separately, but on synchronized positions.

#### **#14**

**Turkey not ready to return envoy to Washington: PM**

**By Paul Handley**

**AFP, March 9, 2010**

RIYADH — Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Tuesday Turkey is not ready to return its ambassador to Washington after a US Congress panel branded the World War I massacre of Armenians as genocide.

"As long as the situation does not get any clearer we will not send back our ambassador to Washington," Erdogan said about the tiff over the Armenia resolution passed by the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Thursday.

"America should not let go of a strategic ally like Turkey over such an issue," he said.

An infuriated Ankara recalled Ambassador Namik Tan on Thursday, shortly after the panel narrowly approved the non-binding resolution.

The move, opposed by the administration of President Barack Obama, now opens the door for a vote by the full House of Representatives.

Erdogan called the move "a comedy stunt" and blamed the vote on a combination of "unbecoming" voting procedures in the US Congress and a change of attitude by the "Jewish lobby" to back the action.

"The Jewish lobby in the US supported this resolution," he said.

The resolution calls on Obama to ensure that US foreign policy reflects an understanding of the "genocide" and to label the mass killings as such in his annual statement on the issue.

Armenians say up to 1.5 million of their kin were killed during World War I by their Ottoman rulers in a planned campaign of extermination as the empire was falling apart, a stance that is supported by several other countries.

The massacres followed a roundup in Istanbul on April 24, 1915, the date on which Armenians each year hold rallies around the world.

Turkey categorically rejects the genocide label. It argues that between 300,000 and 500,000 Armenians and at least as many Turks were killed in civil strife when Armenians rose up for independence and sided with invading Russian forces.

Ankara is concerned that if the killings are officially labelled genocide by Washington or others, this could possibly open the door to legal claims for restitution by the descendants of those who died, according to some analysts.

In a bid to limit the fallout of the committee's decision, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Friday the administration would "work very hard" to stop the resolution from going before the full House.

Following US-backed bridge-building talks, Turkey and Armenia signed a deal last October to establish diplomatic relations and open their border.

But the process has already hit the rocks, with Ankara accusing Yerevan of trying to tweak the terms of the deal and Yerevan charging that Ankara is not committed to ratifying the accord.

Meanwhile Erdogan, who was in Riyadh to receive the King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam, rejected a new round of sanctions on Iran to halt its alleged drive to acquire nuclear weapons capability.

Washington has been strongly lobbying countries in the Middle East in recent weeks to support a tighter crackdown on companies linked to the Iranian regime and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, to pressure Tehran to give up its nuclear drive.

"I don't believe that any further sanctions will yield results," he told a group of journalists during a talk about Turkey's role in Middle East politics.

"The first and second rounds (of sanctions) have never yielded results."

He also said he believe that Israel was ready to accept Turkey as a mediator in Israeli-Syrian peace talks, frozen since December 2008 when Israel launched a 22 day assault on Gaza.

"There is an interest in revitalising these talks. Syria wants Turkey as the mediator," he said.

"Israel has been moving on this so possibly we can restart talks, I hope," he said.

He added that there were "only a few more sentences" to be sorted out in a peace pact when the talks were suspended nearly 15 months ago.

**#15**  
**Russian Village Haunted By A Hidden Holocaust Past**  
**By David Greene**  
**NPR, March 9, 2010**

The Holocaust memorial in the seaside Russian town of Yantarny is out of the way. A bumpy road leads down a hill, toward the chilly waters of the Baltic Sea. Climb over a rope, walk around a restaurant and there are a few stones arranged like a pyramid and, nearby, a long inscription in Russian.

The words recall a massacre on this beach in January 1945, described on the memorial as the last act of the Holocaust.

Some may debate whether it was really the last act, but what happened here did come several days after Auschwitz was liberated. The Nazis still had Jewish prisoners on the move. One death march, which began with 7,000 people, ended here in the town, then known as Palmnicken.

Frail women and children were ordered into the icy water and shot dead.

It's been more than six decades since the end of World War II, but this village in the westernmost part of Russia is still coming to terms with its role in the Holocaust.

**A Peculiar Past**

Even 65 years later, some in Yantarny are still unaware of what happened — like Vladimir Nikolaevich, who was leaving a fishing hole near the memorial.

"What Holocaust?" he said in Russian, when asked about the beach's past. "It's unlikely there were victims here."

A German who witnessed some of the killings has written a book about the massacre. But the memorial, dedicated in 2000, became the first tangible recognition of the Holocaust anywhere in a Russian province of 1 million people.

One reason is the area's peculiar history: This Baltic coastline was East Prussia. After the war, the victorious Soviets seized the province, renamed it Kaliningrad and repopulated it with Russians. As the Germans died or left, so did their memories.

But Viktor Shapiro, a prominent voice in the Kaliningrad region's small Jewish community, points to something else.

One of the hallmarks of Soviet rule, he says, was to downplay any ethnic or religious differences among Soviet citizens. And so, to single out Jewish people as special victims of fascism, he says, would have contradicted Communist policy.

As for the memorial on the beach, Shapiro visits it often. He says he hopes it begins to teach people that the Holocaust left its mark here.

## 'Everyone Kept Silent'

The director of a history museum in Yantarny, Lyudmila Kirpinyova, was born in the town in 1958. She remembers her parents telling her to stay away from a beach close to her house. Looking back, she says her parents — and some others in the village — may have known about what happened in 1945.

"In those days, everyone kept silent; they did not reveal anything," she says. "Even now, my husband tells me if I had a shorter tongue, I'd be of greater value. But since I couldn't speak much in the past, now is my time to speak — a lot — at last."

But only to a point. The history of East Prussia is represented in the museum, along with portraits of Vladimir Lenin and Soviet memorabilia. But it's hard to find anything about the Holocaust.

The museum director says she will never force people to confront what happened here.

"There are people who would like to speak about those events and people who don't want to speak or even think about it," Kirpinyova says. "It's not for us to judge."

## #16

### 'Forbes' Rich List: Number Of New Billionaires Reflects Global Recovery

By Nikola Krastev

RFE/RL, March 11, 2010

NEW YORK -- The editor in chief of "Forbes" magazine, Steve Forbes, says the number of new billionaires in the world is a sure sign that the global economy is recovering from its brush with disaster.

"The number of billionaires has gone from 793 last year to 1,011 this year, almost to where it was [in] the record level of 2008," Forbes told reporters at a new conference in New York to announce the magazine's annual ranking. "The overall net worth of these billionaires is \$3.6 trillion, up from \$2.4 trillion just a year ago -- a 50 percent increase."

In 2009, the global financial crisis wiped out some 300 members of the dollar-billionaires club. This year, 164 of them are back on the list, joined by 97 first-time members.

The average worth of the world's billionaires is now \$3.5 billion, or \$500 million more than last year. These fantastically rich citizens come from 55 countries -- two of which have never before made the list: Finland and Pakistan.

The biggest surprise on the list is the world's new richest man. With a personal fortune of \$53.5 billion, Carlos Slim Helu, a mobile phone mogul from Mexico, has dethroned Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, who held the top spot for more than 10 years.

Gates is now second, followed by American investor Warren Buffet. Gates and Buffet have each donated billions of dollars to worthy causes, which decreased their fortunes and opened the door for Slim's rise.

## Asia Charges Ahead

Forbes declared that Asia is leading the world's financial recovery and said the number of its billionaires, 234, reflects the "remarkable changes taking place in the global economy," as emerging economies flex their new muscles.

The United States, he says, is meanwhile slipping. The United States used to account for nearly half the names on the list, but now its share is just 40 percent -- or 403 billionaires. The United States still dominates the world economy, Forbes says, but he notes "it's not doing as well as the rest of the world in coming back from the financial crisis."

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg is the world's youngest billionaire.

This year there are 12 new female billionaires on the list for a total of 89 -- less than 10 percent of this exclusive group.

The youngest billionaire is the founder of the online social networking site Facebook -- 25-year-old American Mark Zuckerberg, whose net worth is estimated at \$4 billion.

Romania has three billionaires, up from one in 2009; Ukraine has five, up from four; while the Czech Republic has three, up from one.

Senior "Forbes" editor Luisa Kroll says Russia is the comeback story of this year's list because so many names on the list -- 62 in all -- are returnees who fell off during the financial crisis. That's attributed to the strong rebound of commodities prices, particularly oil and gas, which the Russian economy has traditionally relied on.

"Forbes" uses 40 reporters in 13 countries to research people's wealth and verify information for the annual list.

Kroll says staff members send out written questionnaires to people they think might qualify for the list and generally get back three different types of responses: those who respond to every question and try to convince "Forbes" they're worth more than they actually are; those who cooperate but won't reveal all the information asked for; and those who refuse to participate at all.

She says lots of Russians fall into the last category.

"Russia has a lot of people that don't want to be on the list. They don't want to cooperate," she says, and they complain about their ranking.

#### Prickly Russians

Kroll says Russians pose some of the toughest cases for magazine staffers trying to separate fact from fiction.

For example, she says, discovering details about Yelena Baturina -- the wife of Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov and the only female Russian billionaire on the list -- has not been easy.

"We've obviously had some issues with her in the past, when our colleagues, 'Forbes Russia' -- who works with us on this list -- did a story, but we'll see," Kroll says. "Obviously, she's benefited from the general rebound in the real estate and construction sector."

Baturina -- with an estimated net worth of \$2.9 billion -- is known for her aggressive approach toward media reports on her wealth. In 2007, her construction company Inteco successfully sued "Forbes Russia" over an article that detailed her business dealings.

In 2010, she successfully sued the "Sunday Times" of London for reporting that she was planning to buy an exclusive property in the city.

Billionaires want to keep a low profile for lots of reasons -- from personal safety concerns to not wanting financial competitors to know what they're up to. But sometimes, Forbes says, it's as simple as a marriage problem.

"The classic story we had on that kind of rich list was several years ago," he says. "Somebody complained very bitterly, not about our estimate of the wealth, but the fact that he was in the midst of a divorce and now his wife knew what to go for."

#17

## **Gorbachev's Legacy Examined, 25 Years After His Rise To Power**

**by Brian Whitmore**

**RFE/RL, March 11, 2010**

All the familiar signs were there. Something was very wrong in Moscow. Black limousines sped to and from the Kremlin in the dead of night. Classical music replaced regular programming on television. An ageing leader had not been seen in public in months.

But when the ailing 73-year-old Konstantin Chernenko died on the evening of March 10, 1985 -- the third Soviet leader to expire in just over two years -- there were also clear signals that something different was afoot. For one thing, it took the Central Committee just four hours to choose a successor, the fastest transition in Soviet history.

In a clear break from tradition, official Soviet newspapers showcased the appointment of the country's new leader on the front page the next morning, relegating Chernenko's obituary to page two. The Soviet elite, it appeared, was eager to turn the page -- and turn the page they did.

### A Culmination

It was 25 years ago today that a 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev became the youngest-ever leader of the Soviet Union. He began his tenure seeking to reform, and thus save, a decrepit Soviet system that was falling behind its Western rivals in every way. He ended up transforming his country beyond recognition, leading to the breakup of a once-mighty superpower and the end of the Cold War.

In a recent interview with RFE/RL's Russian Service, Gorbachev, now 79, said that despite the fact that his reform program did not turn out as he would have wished, he nevertheless had no regrets.

"There were so many trials, so much work, day and night, night and day, and people were ungrateful," Gorbachev said. "But then I asked myself, 'Why should people thank you?' The question should be put the other way around: 'You've had such great luck, to be able to change this massive country. What greater happiness can you ask for?'"

Since leaving office following the 1991 Soviet collapse, Gorbachev has moved in and out of the public eye. A fierce critic of Russia's first post-Soviet leader, Boris Yeltsin, he ran unsuccessfully for president in 1996, winning just 0.5 percent of the vote.

He has been more supportive of Yeltsin's successors, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. But recently, he has emerged as a critic of the Russian leadership's backsliding on democratic principles.

On March 5, Gorbachev accused Prime Minister Putin's government of trying to initiate a modernization program for Russia from the top down, "practically without the people." Gorbachev also harshly criticized the ruling United Russia party of seeking a monopoly on power "like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, only worse."

Gorbachev's ascent to power represented a generational sea change. For decades, the country had been ruled by the so-called Class of 1937, the generation of officials who had survived Stalin's purges and rose in the Soviet bureaucracy following his death.

Epitomized by longtime Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, who ruled from 1964 until his death in 1982, that generation survived World War II and the Great Terror -- and prized caution and stability above all.

The Soviet Union became a global superpower under the rule of Brezhnev and his contemporaries, but by the late 1970s and early 1980s, its economy was stagnant, life expectancy had plummeted, and public cynicism was rampant.

As Vadim Medvedev, a onetime Gorbachev aide and former high-ranking Communist Party official, explains, by the mid-1980s, there was a widespread consensus that younger and more dynamic leadership was needed.

"I understood," Medvedev says, "and many others understood, that change was necessary and this change was connected to the election of a new young leader."

Gorbachev promoted like-minded people to key posts. He replaced Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who had served in his post for 28 years -- and was known in the West as "Mr. Nyet" -- with Eduard Shevardnadze. He also brought Aleksandr Yakovlev, the former Soviet ambassador to Canada, into the Politburo as his chief ideologist.

### Overhauling The System

Gorbachev began his reforms methodically. In April 1985, he called for a policy of "acceleration," a fast-paced technological modernization and an increase in agricultural and industrial production. He also instituted quality control on consumer goods and initiated an antialcohol campaign.

Medvedev tells RFE/RL's Russian Service that initially, Gorbachev thought he could rely on more or less traditional Soviet methods to revive the economy.

But it soon became clear to the new Soviet leader that the system was in need of a more fundamental overhaul. He used the occasion of the 27th Communist Party Congress in February-March 1986 to announce his signature policy of perestroika, or restructuring.

"When we took the first steps with perestroika, we tried to change the economic situation with more well-known methods -- strengthening discipline and order, improving management techniques," Medvedev says. "Later we saw that we needed to go deeper."

By early 1987 Gorbachev introduced limited market mechanisms, allowing the opening of small private businesses, or cooperatives, and decentralizing economic decisionmaking for state enterprises. He also proposed multicandidate elections for some local government posts.

In an effort to pressure conservative elements in the Communist Party, Gorbachev also introduced the policy of glasnost, or openness, relaxing censorship of the media and restrictions on free speech. Political prisoners were freed, victims of Stalin's purges were rehabilitated, free expression flourished, and previously banned books were officially published.

"We soon understood that economic change wasn't possible without political and ideological change," Medvedev explains the motivation behind these more radical political moves. "We needed a complete change in our society's point of view."

In the summer of 1988, Gorbachev launched his most radical and consequential reform, a complete overhaul of the of the government apparatus. He established a new legislature, the Congress of Peoples' Deputies, part of which would be chosen in competitive, multicandidate elections. He also established a new executive presidency, which would be elected by the new legislature.

### A Life Of Its Own

On March 15, 1990, slightly more than five years after coming to power, Gorbachev was elected the Soviet Union's first -- and ultimately last -- president.

Together with Shevardnadze, Gorbachev also pursued a rapprochement with the West, signing key arms control pacts with U.S. presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. When Soviet satellite regimes fell across Eastern Europe and the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, Gorbachev did not intervene, earning himself a Nobel Peace Prize in the process.

But the forces Gorbachev unleashed soon took on a life of their own, ultimately derailing his goal of modernizing -- and thus saving -- the Soviet Union.

His economic reforms undermined the moribund, centrally planned economy without establishing a functioning market to replace it, leading to widespread shortages, rationing, and public discontent. The intelligentsia initially rallied behind glasnost, giving Gorbachev support against party hard-liners; but the new openness opened the door for his critics as well.

Independence movements flourished in the Soviet republics, most prominently in the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia. (Lithuania today marks the 20th anniversary of the day it became the first of the republics to declare its independence from the Soviet Union – exactly five years to the day after Gorbachev came to power.)

Age-old feuds, like the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, erupted and threatened to destabilize the country. The new legislature gave a political home to a nascent democratic movement, led by former political prisoner and Nobel laureate Andrei Sakharov, which was less interested in reforming Soviet Communism than in ending it.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Gorbachev had completely lost the initiative. Democrats were angry with him for not pushing reform far enough, hard-line Communists and Russian nationalists accused him of going too far and destroying the country, and independence movements in the republics were clamoring for autonomy.

When a hard-line coup against Gorbachev failed in August 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated into 15 independent countries.

As Medvedev explains, this outcome was the furthest thing from anybody's mind when Gorbachev first rose to power 25 years ago.

"Nobody, including Gorbachev himself, imagined the scope of changes that were coming," Medvedev says. "This all unfolded later in the process."

## **#18**

### **FACTBOX-Challenges facing new Ukrainian government**

**Reuters, March 11, 2010**

Ukraine's parliament appointed ex-finance minister Mykola Azarov, a close ally of President Viktor Yanukovich, prime minister on Thursday as the country moved to restore stability and tackle an economic crisis.

Following are some of the challenges facing the new leadership, which comes to power after years of fractious rule since the pro-Western Orange Revolution in 2004.

#### **ADOPT 2010 BUDGET**

Parliament must adopt the 2010 budget, delayed for months by political infighting. The version on the table was drafted by the cabinet of outgoing Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, targeting a deficit of around 4 percent.

The draft can be changed, and could fall foul of some of the more populist pledges made by Yanukovich in his presidential campaign.

Yanukovich has said he will stick to the wage increases passed by parliament last year and which derailed a \$16.4 billion bail-out package from the International Monetary Fund.

#### **SECURE RESUMPTION OF IMF LENDING**

The IMF held back a \$3.5 billion tranche expected last November after parliament increased minimum wages and pensions by up to 10 percent, a move that would cost the budget billions of dollars it does not have.

The fund has insisted household gas prices be increased. Yanukovich has said he wants to renegotiate the IMF deal, which could mean months of further talks.

The outgoing government says the IMF is unlikely to resume funding until the second half of this year, leaving the country to find between \$3 billion and \$5 billion per quarter to cover budget spending.

#### MAINTAIN DEBT REPAYMENTS

Investors continue to worry that Ukraine may have problems repaying its short-term domestic debt, which it has been issuing in increasing volumes and sky-high yields as the economic crisis takes its toll and IMF funding remains absent.

The state has just one foreign debt to repay this year -- a 35 billion yen (\$390 million) Samurai bond due in December.

Its monthly domestic debt bill is getting higher and will spike in April when the finance minister has to repay treasury bills worth 3.7 billion hryvnias (\$460 million).

On Wednesday, the country repaid in full and on time T-bills worth 596 million hryvnias (\$75 million), meaning so far Kiev has the ability and will to repay its debts despite the political uncertainty.

#### RENEGOTIATE GAS DEAL WITH RUSSIA?

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin forged a long-term gas deal in 2009 with Yanukovich's election rival Tymoshenko, removing the preferential price treatment for Ukraine and bringing rates paid in line with the market.

Ukraine is an important export route for Russian oil and gas to Europe but strained relations with Russia after the 2004 Orange Revolution led to price disputes and cuts in supply.

Many analysts believe Ukraine's desperate public finances mean Yanukovich must push to renegotiate the deal to lower onerous gas bills, but there were no public promises from Moscow on his first official visit there on March 5.

Reports have suggested Yanukovich will offer Moscow a one-third stake in the management of its gas pipelines in exchange for big price cuts.

#### NAVIGATE RELATIONS WITH WEST AND RUSSIA

Yanukovich, seen as broadly pro-Russian, must balance the expectations of the Kremlin with Ukraine's need for Western financial support. He has declared he sees Ukraine as a "European non-aligned state", a bridge between East and West, but Russia remains a priority.

He has hinted at possible concessions to Moscow over the future of Russia's Black Sea fleet, based in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.

The West wants Ukraine to have more stable ties with Russia to avoid more gas cut-offs, but it also wants Yanukovich to carry out painful economic reforms that could meet resistance from his wealthy industrialist backers.

Being seen as too pro-Russian will not play well with Ukraine's nationalist constituency based in the west and centre of the country. More than half of voters cast ballots against him in the Feb. 7 run-off against Tymoshenko, a huge bloc to take into consideration in running the country.

**#19**

## **Ukraine Appoints Pro-Moscow Government**

**By Gregory Feifer**

**RFE/RL, March 11, 2010**

Ukraine's parliament appointed a new prime minister after pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich formed a new governing coalition in the legislature today.

Yanukovich has moved quickly to form a government following the ouster of the country's Orange Revolution leaders in a presidential election last month.

The new coalition is centered around Yanukovich's pro-Moscow Party of Regions, which picked former Finance Minister Mykola Azarov for the post of prime minister. Parliament confirmed the appointment soon after.

A controversial figure among liberal circles, the Russian-born Azarov is a top ally of Yanukovich's. The technocrat replaces former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, the fiery Orange Revolution heroine who narrowly lost the bitter election to Yanukovich last month.

A stern figure, Azarov spent six years as head of the state tax administration under Yanukovich's old patron, former President Leonid Kuchma. Critics at the time devised the term "azarovshina" from his name to refer to what they called his Soviet-style heavy handedness and corruption.

Speaking in parliament today, Azarov promised structural reforms, lashing out at Tymoshenko's outgoing government, which he said had left Ukraine's coffers empty, adding that the situation in the country "critical."

"Our task is to provide the people with just and effective rule," he said. "We're speaking honestly about the situation in Ukraine and what we want to do about it."

Tymoshenko later dismissed Azarov's criticism. Speaking to reporters, she said "the first thing [the new cabinet] will do is to divide the money flow among themselves."

### **Cabinet Takes Shape**

The parliament approved nominations for other top cabinet posts, including businessman Borys Kolesnykov as deputy prime minister. Another close Yanukovich ally seen as a main strategist for the Party of Regions, Kolesnykov was among those temporarily arrested in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution. He denies all allegations of wrongdoing connected to the racketeering charges brought against him.

Most of the other posts also went to Yanukovich allies, except for the surprise choice of Kostyantyn Hryshchenko for foreign minister. Previously Ukraine's ambassador to Russia, he's seen as a pro-Western figure.

The new government is taking shape after Tymoshenko's governing coalition fell apart last week, when some of its members defected. Among them was parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn, who announced the formation of the new group in parliament today, calling it a coalition of "stability and reform."

"The coalition has been formed on the basis of an agreement signed by heads of the factions of the Party of Regions, the Communist Party, the Lytvyn bloc, and the People's Party," Lytvyn said.

Serhiy Tihipko was named deputy prime minister in charge of economic policy.

Some had expected Yanukovich to pick one of two centrist politicians for prime minister, including former central banker Serhiy Tihipko. Yanukovich's onetime campaign manager, Tihipko placed a strong third in the first round of the presidential election in January. Yanukovich has picked him to head economic policy as a deputy prime minister.

James Sherr of London's Chatham House told RFE/RL's Ukrainian service that Yanukovich's decision to choose a cabinet of close allies instead of forming a broad-based reform government means policy will be influenced chiefly

by Yanukovych's backers. He calls them "less competitive businesses that do not welcome globalization and real competition."

"It's going to be a coalition that's very reassuring for rent-seeking bureaucracies who earn their money at the expense of real entrepreneurship in the country," he said. "And it will multiply channels of Russian influence on the new administration."

### The End Of Orange Leadership

Tymoshenko's loss of the prime minister's seat was a final repudiation of the Orange Revolution's leaders amid widespread disillusionment in their political infighting and failed promises of reform.

Tymoshenko says she'll now lead a joint opposition. She accuses Yanukovych of stealing the election through fraud, and bribing members of parliament to abandon her coalition.

The new coalition includes 235 deputies from the 450-seat parliament. Its formation enables Yanukovych to avoid calling snap parliamentary elections, and helps him address his most pressing task: pulling Ukraine out of a devastating economic crisis.

The new president is keen to restart talks with the International Monetary Fund, which last year froze a \$16.4 billion bailout.

Yanukovych is also steering Ukraine back toward Russia after five years of pro-Western rule. The Kremlin openly campaigned for him in 2004, when his victory in a rigged presidential election prompted the Orange Revolution that overturned the results and brought his rivals to power.

After his remarkable comeback, Yanukovych indicated he would put an end to Ukraine's drive to join NATO, which infuriated the Kremlin, and renegotiate a gas supply deal with Moscow, which some believe would enable him to reestablish closer ties with Russia's Gazprom.

### **#20 Difficult Task Defining Bandera's Historic Role By Alexander J. Motyl Moscow Times, March 11, 2010**

Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's decision to confer the title of Hero of Ukraine on nationalist leader Stepan Bandera on Jan. 22 has unleashed a storm of outrage inside and outside Ukraine. Critics accuse Yushchenko of whitewashing a Nazi-era fascist and betraying the ideals of the Orange Revolution that brought him to power. Some hint darkly at a resurgence of fascism in Ukraine.

As always, the reality is more complicated. Just who was Bandera and what does he represent?

Bandera headed the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, a nationalist movement that emerged in 1929 and took root in the Ukrainian-inhabited lands of eastern Poland in the 1930s. Neither Bandera nor the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists was fascist, although both had fascist inclinations — particularly in 1940 and 1941. Fascists run or aspire to run existing nations. Nationalists, in contrast, aspire to create nations. Fascists are always authoritarians and chauvinists; nationalists can be liberals, democrats, Communists, authoritarians or fascists. Nationalists and fascists sometimes look alike, especially to conceptually challenged analysts, but their differences are greater than their similarities.

Like the Algerian nationalists in the National Liberation Front, the Palestinian nationalists in the Palestine Liberation Organization or the Jewish nationalists in the Irgun, the Ukrainian nationalists were unconditionally committed to national liberation and independent statehood. All four movements had hierarchical structures, authoritarian leanings and strong leaders and engaged in violence and terrorism against their perceived enemies. Bandera was the Ukrainian version of Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat, not Adolf Hitler.

Bandera hoped for an alliance with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. But the Nazis failed to oblige, cracking down on the nationalists in mid-1941, imprisoning Bandera in Sachsenhausen and inadvertently saving him and his supporters from a collaborationist and possibly fascist fate. In the years that followed, the nationalists did fight both the Germans and the Soviets, but they also fought and killed thousands of Poles and participated in anti-Jewish actions. The nationalists abandoned their fascist leanings in the mid-1940s and then spearheaded a vicious anti-Soviet struggle through the mid-1950s. Bandera himself was assassinated by a Soviet agent in Munich in 1959.

Soviet propaganda always demonized the nationalists — not for their violations of human rights, of course, but because of their unconditional opposition to Stalinist rule. By the same token, Russians picked up on official cues and frequently insulted Ukrainians who dared to speak their own language or show any signs of nationalist pride by referring to them derogatorily as “Banderas.”

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, all of the newly independent states began questioning the Soviet historical narrative and constructing their own histories. What Soviet historians had assiduously ignored or distorted became the object of research, discussion and debate. The term Russian chauvinists had used derogatorily — “Banderas”— became a term of praise, much in the way that blacks appropriated the “N-word.”

For many Russians, the quest for historical memory meant accepting Stalin and Stalinism as qualified goods. For non-Russians, the quest for historical memory became inextricably connected to the search for an anti-Soviet identity. The former Soviet republics have focused on the violent, forced conditions under which they were incorporated into the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, as well as the destruction they experienced under Lenin and Stalin, the repression and stagnation they experienced under Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev and the opportunity for freedom they seized under Mikhail Gorbachev.

For Ukrainians, these discoveries were particularly painful. The Communist Party had done a particularly thorough job of destroying Ukrainian historical memory, but at the same time Ukraine experienced astounding human losses in the first half of the 20th century. Unsurprisingly, Ukrainian historians centered on the Great Famine of 1932-33, the Holodomor, which took some 4 million lives. Although the issue of whether the Holodomor should be classified as “genocide” has always been debatable, the tide has recently shifted. The emerging consensus is that the famine was part of Stalin’s deliberate campaign against Ukrainians.

Attention also centered on the villains of Soviet propaganda — Bandera and the nationalists. Most Ukrainian historians are actually quite objective in their treatment of the movement, seeing both its virtues and all too many sins. Contemporary Ukrainian nationalists who lionize Bandera generally do so because he represents an unconditional devotion to Ukrainian independence and rejection of all things Soviet. Putin’s attempts to undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty only enhanced Bandera’s attractiveness among Ukrainian nationalists.

Of course, this brief reading of Ukrainian history is one-sided, and a full account would entail both the good and the bad things that Bandera did. But one-sided readings are not unusual, especially among insecure nations struggling to retain their newfound independence. In their national narratives, Algerians overlook the massacres of French by Algerian nationalists, Palestinians overlook the violence against Israelis, and Israelis overlook the expulsion of Palestinians. Even self-confident Americans remember President Harry Truman for his successful conclusion of World War II, conveniently downplaying the controversial decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Bandera became especially popular as the noble ideals of the 2004 Orange Revolution were progressively tarnished by the heroes of that revolution, Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The more unpopular Yushchenko became, the more he promoted Bandera and the nationalists in the hope that some of their idealistic glow would rub off on him. Unfortunately, Yushchenko’s ill-considered conferral of Hero of Ukraine status on Bandera threw a wrench into a more or less even-tempered discussion of the nationalists and their legacy. Yushchenko’s critics — among them Putin and other top Russian officials who have indirectly rehabilitated Stalin — added fuel to the fire with their irresponsible accusations of fascism. At this point, a sensible discussion is almost impossible in the highly politicized atmosphere surrounding Bandera.

The objective, even-handed accounts of Ukrainian historians, who see Bandera in all his complexity, will eventually seep into the public realm, but only after Ukrainian identity is consolidated and Ukrainian fears of a neo-imperial Russia subside. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich could promote this shift by unifying the country around a common identity and history, vigorously protecting Ukrainian interests vis-a-vis Moscow and eschewing Yushchenko's proclivity for provocation. Europe could help by opening its doors to Ukraine, and Russia can assist by rejecting Stalinism. And we should not forget about Western historians in this equation, who can do their part by refraining from simple-minded analyses.

*Alexander J. Motyl is a professor of political science at Rutgers University-Newark.*

**#21**

**The Matzah of Hope  
By Rabbi Yehiel Poupko  
JUF News, March 2010**

This Is The Matzah of Hope:

This matzah, which we set aside as a symbol of hope, for the three million Jews of the Soviet Union, reminds us of the indestructible link that exists between us. As we observe this festival of freedom, we know that Soviet Jews are not free to learn of their Jewish past, to hand it down to their children. They cannot learn the languages of their fathers. They cannot teach their children to be the teachers, the rabbis of future generations.

They can only sit in silence and become invisible. We shall be their voice, and our voices shall be joined by thousands of men of conscience aroused by the wrongs suffered by Soviet Jews. Then shall they know that they have not been forgotten and they that sit in darkness shall yet see a great light.

I suspect that many Jews under 30 have little memory of the prayer, The Matzah of Hope, and that some of us over 30 have forgotten it. The prayer was recited over the designation of a fourth matzah at the Seder tables of millions of Jews throughout the world from the late 1960s to 1990.

At what times in the more than 3,000 year history of the Jewish people did our Pesach Seders and prayers have such powerful historical and political consequences for us and for the rest of world, as in those years?

Twenty years ago the Jewish people achieved one of the two great Jewish victories of the 20th century, a century that witnessed the single greatest defeat in Jewish history, the Holocaust (and the greatest victory, the creation of the State of Israel).

Left behind on the slaughter fields after the close of World War Two, were more than three million Jews of the Soviet Union. Understanding their fate requires a short history review.

At the end of the 1890's Konstantin Pobedonostsev, counselor to Czar Alexander III, when asked what would become of the more than 5.5 million Jews of the Russian empire, replied: "One third will convert, one third will be killed, and one third will emigrate." This is one of the most devilishly accurate prophecies about Jews in the modern period.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Jewish people were briefly optimistic. The Bolsheviks quickly abolished the restrictions of the Pale of Settlement and other Czarist anti-Jewish legislation. Indeed, the first president of the Soviet Union, its first foreign minister, and the founder of the Soviet Army, were Jews who, beginning in the mid-1920's, systematically destroyed and outlawed Jewish life in the Soviet Union. Then came the terrible suffering of the Holocaust, and the dark Stalinist night that descended in the Soviet lands after the defeat of the Nazis.

When Stalin died in 1953 and the immediate threat of oppression and deportation to Siberia subsided, Jews in the Soviet Union turned inward. They could not afford to be vocal or visible. Nevertheless, they did not forget their Jewishness. The Jewish practice they held onto more than any other was the eating of Passover matzah. The

officials retaliated by shutting down matzah baking operations, putting Jews on trial for the “crime” of baking matzah.

In 1967 came the Six Day War. Filled with an immense sense of pride and fortitude, the Jews in the Soviet Union began their uprising. When Soviet Jews rose up, Jews in America and around the world rose up. It is no exaggeration to say that this Jewish uprising made a significant contribution to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

### Celebrating ‘Let My People Go!’

Passover bequeathed to the Jewish people and to the world, the immortal words that God gave to Moses to declare to Pharaoh: “Shalakh Et Ami—Let My People Go!” For 30 years, armed with those three simple words, we marched, picketed, leafleted, and made our voices heard in the halls of power throughout the Western world. We banged on doors, sometimes politely, always firmly, sometimes loudly, and we did not let the world rest. We did not let business go on as usual.

For three decades, Jews sat down at their Seder tables, and after identifying the three traditional matzahs and explaining the reason for them, we designated a fourth matzah, over which we recited the prayer, The Matzah of Hope. After 30 years the Soviet Jewry movement, which had been fueled and fired at our Seder tables, was victorious.

This great victory, the liberation of more than 1.25 million Jews from the tyranny of Communism and the Soviet Union, should have given birth to a holiday to celebrate this wonderful and miraculous accomplishment. Still it is not too late to once again tell the tale of those days and their greatness. This retelling of the slavery in Russia and the Exodus from the Soviet Union should be part of our Jewish family and communal life.

Celebrating this victory fits well with our Pesach remembrances. There is a natural and easy way to do it. This most recent Exodus builds a bridge across a chasm. Most North American Jews are the descendants of those who left East European and Russian lands between 1881 and 1914. The people who stayed behind—brothers, sisters, cousins, neighbors, and friends—in thousands of small Jewish towns, were the grandparents and great-grandparents of the people we helped to liberate, who are reunited with us in Israel, North America, and elsewhere since the Soviet collapse. We can deepen the meaning of this Exodus if we will recall that the history of so many families is bound up with the Russian lands.

The Passover Haggadah begins with the words, “Ha Lakhma Anya—Behold the Bread of Affliction, which our ancestors ate in the Land of Mitzrayim/Egypt...” When we finish that line we ought to read it into the lives of each of our families. “Behold the Bread of Affliction, which our ancestors ate in the lands of Russia and Eastern Europe not too long ago...” And the Jews of Arab and Islamic lands surely have their Ha Lakhma Anya...of the 19th and 20th centuries. And then at this point, a family member who knows the family history or some older child or teenager who has done a family history project for school, can retell the tale of the family’s Exodus in the late 19th or early 20th century.

The outline of the narrative is simple: what country, what province, what little village did we come from? When did we choose to leave, who chose to leave, why did we leave? How did we make our way across Europe and the Atlantic? Where did we first settle in the United States? How did we come to Chicago? What was life like in the new land in its first several years?

Answering these questions builds the family history. Every member of the family can be responsible for the answers. For we are, each of us, the children and great-grandchildren of those who were unfed and unclothed, who knew cold and flight. When they left, others stayed behind, who were able to come only 100 years later.

If we repeat The Matzah of Hope in celebration of a prayer now answered, and if we recite, “Behold the Bread of Affliction, which our family ate not too long ago...”, then we will have married our family destiny a century ago to the contemporary liberation of Soviet Jews.

We saw all this and we can therefore affirm, as it is written in the Haggadah: “B’chol dor v’dor... In each and every generation each of us is obligated to present ourselves as if we went forth from Egypt.”

*Rabbi Yehiel E. Poupko is Judaic Scholar at the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.*

**#22**

**Historic campaign to rescue, resettle Soviet Jews celebrates 20 years**

**By Jane Charney**

**JUF News, March 2010**

When Ilya Milshteyn's family emigrated from Rovno, Ukraine, in 1991, they were immediately plugged into a support network that spanned language training, Jewish education, healthcare, housing assistance and job placement.

"[Coming to Chicago] was an eye-opening experience," said Milshteyn, who was 11 at the time and remembers studying in a class full of other recent Russian-speaking immigrants.

Families like Milshteyn's benefitted from the Chicago Jewish community's active participation in Operation Exodus, the massive effort that netted more than \$1 billion between 1990 and 1997 to rescue and resettle Soviet Jews in Israel, the United States or Canada. Chicago raised about \$60 million in the first three years of the campaign and welcomed 10 percent of Soviet immigrants to the United States.

"[Operation Exodus] is a historic opportunity and we must not fail our Soviet brothers and sisters for whom we have fought so long and whose freedom is a blessing for all of us," JUF President Steven B. Nasatir wrote in a letter to the community in early 1991.

A large portion of the funds raised by the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago supported the work of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel and the former Soviet Union. The two organizations are the JF/JUF's primary overseas partners and played an important role in readying Jews to leave the former Soviet Union and absorbing them into Israeli society.

The roots of the campaign lie in 1989, when the Soviet Union suddenly eased restrictions on emigration. Although some Jews were able to leave in the 1970s, emigration was practically non-existent in the 1980s. The exodus of Jews that began in 1989 would ultimately add about 2 million Jews to communities throughout the world, mostly in Israel and North America. U.S. Jewish leaders recognized the historical nature of the move and joined together to finance the resettlement of a community "thought to have been lost to the West forever," as 1990 General Campaign Chairman and later JUF Chairman Barbara Hochberg said in 1990.

"Not only is this a humanitarian undertaking, but the populations that receive these emigrants will also be enriched for generations hence," JUF Chairman John Colman told The Chicago Sun-Times in December 1990, when the effort was already underway.

At the time Operation Exodus began, analysts projected that as many as 5,000 Russian-speaking Jews would settle in Chicago. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) estimates that about 35,000 came to Chicago. Those who left before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 often escaped with a couple hundred dollars and a suitcase. Those who moved later had more resources to begin with, but still required guidance to navigate their new home.

As part of Operation Exodus, the Federation established Shalom: The Welcome Center at the Mayer Kaplan JCC in Skokie. Part of a long-term resettlement effort, the center and community partners such as the Jewish Vocational Service, Mt. Sinai Hospital, CJE SeniorLife and many others, collaboratively provided intense three-day orientation sessions that featured English tests, education assessments, and networking with local Jewish agencies. The Center also offered programming for children and the elderly. Educational agencies, day schools, and the JCCs helped the younger generation learn about being Jewish in a free society. Meanwhile, HIAS Chicago offered special citizenship classes for new Americans that culminated in large-scale citizenship ceremonies completing the long journey from the former Soviet Union to the land of opportunity.

In addition, volunteers from the Chicago Jewish community provided a personal connection for the newly arrived. They hosted Shabbat dinners, Pesach seders and family nights, helping to foster an adjustment to a new life and integration into the American Jewish community.

"We developed a great relationship with our volunteers," Milshteyn said. "The family's older son helped me prepare for my bar mitzvah."

As Chicago celebrates the 20th anniversary of Operation Exodus with a year of programming, JUF News will continue featuring the Jewish community's large-scale response to the needs of Soviet Jews and will profile some of the people whose lives were changed by this monumental effort as well as some of those who were at the helm of the undertaking.

## #23

### **Op-Ed: Lithuanian Jewry needs help to fuel renaissance further**

**By Sanford R. Cardin**

**JTA, March 11, 2010**

TULSA, Okla. -- The warmth emanating from the conference room of the Conti Hotel in Vilnius stood in stark contrast to the damp weather outside. Just steps away from the site of the Vilnius Ghetto, remnants of which can still be found, more than 30 young Jewish activists from across Europe were miraculously networking, studying and sharing their dreams for the Jewish future.

As I listened to their conversations, it quickly became clear why the conference organizers had decided to hold this meeting in Lithuania: There is no place in the world quite like Vilnius, once home to one of the largest and most respected Jewish communities in the world.

Vilnius in the 1700s had approximately 110 synagogues and 10 houses of study (yeshivot). It was home to the great rabbinic sage, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, the famous Gaon of Vilnius, and Yiddish was the lingua franca. As a center of Jewish life, intellectualism and culture, it was known as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania."

By the time World War II started, approximately 250,000 Jews were living in Lithuania -- more than 50 percent of the population of Vilnius was said to be Jewish.

All that changed, however, with the invasion of the Nazis in 1941. Some 180,000 Lithuanian Jews were murdered within months of the country's fall to the Nazis. Before the nightmare was over, more than 95 percent of this once-thriving Jewish community was slaughtered. Properties were confiscated (unlike in other European countries, they have yet to be returned to the Lithuanian Jewish community, despite international appeals), synagogues destroyed and cemeteries desecrated (with the tombstones used for other purposes, including the building of steps and sidewalks).

Today, Lithuania and its Jewish community of 3,500 again are under pressure, albeit of a significantly different kind. They are suffering an economic "double whammy." A darling of investors as a leading emerging market for the past 10 to 15 years, it turns out that most of the growth Lithuania was experiencing was a result of the global real estate bubble. So when that bubble popped, so did Lithuania.

Real estate values have tumbled, banks are in trouble, credit is unavailable and the economy is struggling.

As if that weren't bad enough, the cost of electricity and heat is about to increase by 30-40 percent at the same time as people are being laid off, salaries are being frozen or cut, and state pensions are being reduced or eliminated.

When Lithuania joined the European Union, it agreed to shut down its Ignalina nuclear power plant, a facility susceptible to the same kind of problem experienced in Chernobyl. With the close of the plant on Dec. 31, much more expensive sources of power are needed now to meet the energy requirements of the country.

Is the future of Lithuanian Jewry as bleak as the skies over Vilnius on the darkest of days? Not by a long shot.

In a story now playing out all across Europe, out of the ashes and despite the current economic challenges, Jewish life in Vilnius is slowly re-emerging.

The president of the community is Dr. Simon Alperavitchius, a white-haired elder for whom Yiddish remains his mother tongue. His executive director is a charismatic 28-year-old named Simon Gurevichius, who after graduating from university at the top of his class decided that his career could wait while his beloved Jewish people could not. Simon has molded a community in his image: young, energetic and optimistic.

Under the leadership of the two Simons, Vilnius has developed a thriving kindergarten with 40 pupils this year and 80 in 2011, if the necessary space can be found and funded. There is also a K-12 day school, among the best academic institutions of its kind in Vilnius, in need of space and funds to be able to admit the students it now must wait-list.

Informal Jewish educational opportunities in Vilnius are equally impressive.

But what the future holds for this community is unclear. Without the continued assistance of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, as well as the infusion of funds and expertise from other sources, it will be very difficult for Lithuanian Jewry to keep its emerging young leaders active and engaged. That's the bad news.

The good news is that philanthropists can make a big difference in Vilnius' Jewish life for relatively small sums. The key institutions are in place, the community is motivated and the leadership is as committed today as it was when the Israeli poet Abba Kovner, himself a leader of the Jewish partisans in the Vilnius Ghetto, vowed "to fight rather than go to the slaughter like sheep."

Left to its own devices, Lithuanian Jewry has a chance to bring itself back to life in ways virtually no one believed possible just a few years ago. With the help of others, the future of this once-dominant and resilient center of Jewish life can be assured.

*Sanford R. Cardin is president of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.*