

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 30, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: Russia's election; Iran sanctions; MAUP; OSCE

Dear Friend,

Fallout continues over the legitimacy of Russia's recent regional elections. United Russia (Prime Minister Putin's dominating political party) scored such overwhelming victories in every part of the country that many international and Russian observers have questioned the results. Interestingly, almost everyone who covers politics in the region agrees that vote manipulation was unnecessary, because United Russia would have won handily anyway. There are a number of stories in the update about this ongoing election controversy.

Also in this week's update are articles and commentary about Russia's interest in its neighbors' domestic affairs. The Russian government is keenly interested in Ukraine's upcoming presidential election and continuing political negotiations in Moldova. All of this is occurring at the same time as U.S. Vice President Biden's recent trip to Eastern Europe, where he reiterated America's rejection of "spheres of influence."

On Wednesday, the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs passed new Iran legislation. Led by Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA), the Committee approved the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, which authorizes the President to penalize companies that assist Iran in importing or producing refined petroleum. More than 300 House members are co-sponsors, and the Senate Banking Committee unanimously passed a similar bill yesterday. NCSJ and other national Jewish organizations strongly support this bill, which was the centerpiece of last month's National Jewish Leadership Iran Advocacy Day, when Jewish leaders from across the country met with their Members of Congress in Washington. Russia and the United States continue to discuss how best to deal with Iran, but Russia remains firmly opposed to new sanctions.

The current issue of Moment magazine has an article detailing the rise and (possible) fall of MAUP in Ukraine. We included this story in the update, and I think you will find it to be a good read.

I attended a Congressional Helsinki Commission hearing on Wednesday on "Advancing U.S. Interests in the OSCE Region." The Commission heard from top State and Defense Department officials, who focused on preserving the core principles of the OSCE, particularly the Human Dimensions area. As you know, NCSJ is a major supporter of the Helsinki process; the OSCE is the most significant international body focusing on former Soviet Union. We are active participants in OSCE meetings as well as Commission activities. For full details of this important hearings, visit <http://csce.gov/> and click on "Hearings and Briefings."

Finally, I want to remind you of NCSJ's Annual Board of Governors meeting on Tuesday, December 8, from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. in our Washington offices. More details at <http://www.ncsj.org/Board.html>.

Sincerely,

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. October 30, 2009

-----INDEX OF ARTICLES-----

1. *Ukrainian cemetery restoration project launched; Hotline To Connect Ukrainian, Russian Foreign Ministries; Billionaire Gaydamak sentenced to prison in France; Accolade for ORT Ukraine President*
Briefs, October 26-27, 2009
2. *Why Russians Ignore Ballot Fraud*
By Clifford J. Levy
New York Times, October 25, 2009
3. *Biden Says Trip Has Laid Eastern Europe's 'Reset' Fears To Rest*
By Abubakar Siddique, Brian Whitmore
RFE/RL, October 23, 2009
4. *Tymoshenko makes promise to IMF mission*
Reuters, October 22, 2009
5. *Russia's Medvedev says open to election law ideas*
By Gleb Bryanski
Reuters, October 24, 2009
6. *All Eyes on Medvedev's 'Go, Russia!' Speech*
By Nabi Abdullaev
Moscow Times, October 26, 2009
7. *Ukraine's High Stakes*
By Yevgeny Kiselyov
Moscow Times, October 26, 2009
8. *Is Natan Sharansky Jewish Agency's last, best hope?*
By Dina Kraft
JTA, October 26, 2009
9. *Sharansky vows not to cut JA budget*
By Haviv Rettig Gur
Jerusalem Post, October 26, 2009
10. *Uproar Over Election Fraud Ends in a Fizzle*
By Nikolaus von Twickel
Moscow Times, October 27, 2009
11. *The Dissident Who Came In From the Cold*
By Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova
Newsweek, November 2, 2009

12. *Russia becomes the world's taxicab to space*
By Fred Weir
Christian Science Monitor, October 26, 2009
 13. *Helsinki Commissioners Push for Greater U.S. Promotion of OSCE*
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, October 28, 2009
 14. *World Union Delivers on its Promise and Dedicates New Moscow Center*
World Union for Progressive Judaism, October 29, 2009
 15. *Russia's political murders*
Editorial
Washington Post, October 29, 2009
 16. *Moving Beyond Russia's Embrace*
By Irina Severin
RFE/RL, October 29, 2009
 17. *The Mysterious Tale of a Ukrainian University's Anti-Semitic Crusade*
By Nadine Epstein
Moment Magazine, November/December 2009
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#1a

Ukrainian cemetery restoration project launched JTA, October 26, 2009

A project to restore about 1,500 Jewish cemeteries was launched in Ukraine.

The project, sponsored by the Chevra Kadisha organization and spearheaded by the Jewish community of Zhitomir, will begin by inventorying the Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of the former Soviet Union. The project's office opened last week in Zhitomir.

Many of the Jewish cemeteries that are to be part of the project are located in towns and villages where there is no longer a Jewish community or just a few Jewish residents. Some of the cemeteries have been the target of anti-Semitic attacks and vandalism.

#1b

Billionaire Gaydamak sentenced to prison in France JTA, October 27, 2009

JERUSALEM - A French court sentenced Israeli-Russian billionaire Arcady Gaydamak to six years in prison for illegal arms dealing.

Gaydamak, a businessman who owns the Israeli soccer team Beitar Jerusalem, was sentenced Tuesday for being involved in the deals in the 1990s.

A French and Israeli citizen, he left Israel for Moscow 10 months ago. France and Israel have an extradition treaty; Russia and France do not.

Gaydamak and a partner formed a company to sell \$791 million dollars worth of illegal arms, including tanks, helicopters and a warship, to the Angolan government. The operation involved about 40 suspects, including French government officials and public figures.

#1c

Hotline To Connect Ukrainian, Russian Foreign Ministries Interfax AVN, October 26, 2009

Moscow and Kyiv have agreed on hotlines between the foreign ministries and embassies, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Petro Poroshenko said in an interview published by the Monday issue of the Kommersant newspaper.

Poroshenko visited Moscow late last week for negotiations with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"We have plenty of problems, which should be resolved through dialog rather than through the media. For instance, our ministries and embassies will open hotlines," he said.

"It is hard to call satisfactory the current condition of Ukraine-Russia relations. Hopefully, this is only temporary," the minister said.

The Ukrainian entry into NATO is not on the current agenda, Poroshenko said. "At the same time, Ukrainian laws declare the strategic goal of accession to the alliance, while preserving neighborly relations and strategic partnership with Russia," he said.

"Let us shatter the myth that Ukrainian authorities are allegedly forcing Ukraine into NATO despite people's will," he said.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko initiated Euro-Atlantic integration through a plebiscite, Poroshenko said.

"A plebiscite will decide whether Ukraine will join NATO or some other collective security organization. We do not intend to join any organization just to spite Russia," he said.

#1d

Accolade for ORT Ukraine President World ORT Times, Autumn 2009

The scientific elite of Ukraine have elected the President of ORT Ukraine, Professor Dr Yuriy Yakimenko, to join them as an Academician of the National Academy of Science. Already an Associate Member of the Academy for 10 years, Professor Yakimenko's elevation to the ranks of the 150 Academicians is a huge honour for him personally and, by extension, a sign of the quality of ORT's programmes that the organisation can attract the commitment of someone so eminent in his field.

"This nomination is the highest recognition that Ukraine's scientific community can give a scientist," Professor Yakimenko, a specialist in electronics and informatics, said. "My new rank is useful for ORT because it is well known that I am the President of ORT Ukraine, so ORT's prestige will be raised."

The author of more than 250 scientific works, Professor Yakimenko has filed 35 patents and is the recipient of two national prizes in science and technology. He is one of only two scientists from among Ukraine's more than 150 universities to have been raised to Academician this year.

He is First Vice-Rector of the 40,000-student National Technical University of Ukraine, which was co-founded more than 100 years ago by Dmitri Mendeleev (creator of the first version of the periodic table of elements). Since 1993 Professor Yakimenko has been an increasingly active and influential lay contributor to the ORT mission.

"He was part of the group which was instrumental in re-establishing ORT in the countries of the Former Soviet Union," said Vladimir Dribinskiy, Head of World ORT's Coordination and Education and Technology Departments. "No matter what the initiative, he has always been extremely helpful."

#2

Why Russians Ignore Ballot Fraud

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, October 25, 2009

MOSCOW — Soon after polls closed in regional elections this month, a blogger who refers to himself as Uborshizza huddled away in his Moscow apartment and began dicing up the results on his computer. It took him only a few hours to detect what he saw as a pattern of unabashed ballot-stuffing: how else was it possible that in districts with suspiciously high turnouts in this city, Vladimir V. Putin's party received heaps of votes?

Uborshizza, who by day is a 50-year-old medical statistician named Andrei N. Gerasimov, sketched charts to accompany his conclusions and posted a report on his blog. It spread on the Russian Internet, along with similar findings by a small band of amateur sleuths, numbers junkies and assorted other muckrakers.

Out went their call: This election was dirty! We demand a new one!

The country's response, though, was to avert its eyes.

There was none of the sort of outrage on the streets that occurred in Iran in June, when backers of the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, were accused of rigging the election for him. Nor the international clamor that greeted the voting in Afghanistan, which last week was deemed so tainted that President Hamid Karzai was forced into a runoff.

The apparent brazenness of the fraud and the absence of a spirited reaction says a lot about the deep apathy in Russia, where people grew disillusioned with politics under Communism and have seen little reason to alter their view.

The thinking seems to be that Mr. Putin is in charge and the opposition is feeble, so there is no point in trying to get your voice heard, no matter that the country faces serious problems.

"People are passive because they feel that there is absolutely no opportunity to change the system," Mr. Gerasimov said.

The election also highlighted the coarse political dynamic in Russia.

Mr. Putin, the prime minister and former president, is popular in part because he is given credit for the economic gains and stability of the last decade. He has also suppressed or co-opted the opposition. Fairly or unfairly, his party had enormous advantages in the Oct. 11 elections and was certain to triumph.

Yet the party, United Russia, chose not merely to defeat its opposition, but to crush it.

Such is the impact of the so-called vertical of power, a structure that is a defining trait of the Putin era. The Kremlin wields a concentrated authority and keeps tight rein over regional cadres, which always defer to those at the top.

Before the election, regional officials were told that they would be held accountable if United Russia fared poorly. They seemed to respond by doing whatever they could to ensure overwhelming victory — and preserve their own jobs.

The officials knew that they could act with relative impunity because of United Russia's dominance of the government, as well as the public's indifference. "It seemed as if the pressure to provide the necessary results overcame any fear of being caught," said Sergey Shpilkin, 47, a Moscow resident and physicist by training who blogs as Podmoskovnik.

The official turnout in the Moscow city council election was 36 percent of registered voters, but Mr. Shpilkin was part of a team that estimated that the true figure was 22 percent, with the extra votes improperly assigned to United Russia.

United Russia won 32 of 35 seats, with 3 for the Communists. Mr. Shpilkin said two or three other opposition parties should have won seats.

(After the 2008 presidential election, Mr. Shpilkin did a novel study. He showed that a disproportionately high number of polling stations had figures for overall turnout that ended in either 0 or 5, suggesting that they had been made up. Moreover, stations with higher turnout reported unusually high support for the victor, Mr. Putin's protege, Dmitri A. Medvedev.)

Another blogger who posted an analysis of the election this month said the public's attitude reminded him of a Russian saying, "My hut is on the edge of the village; I know nothing," that speaks to the reluctance to get involved.

"Unfortunately, in society, that sentiment now prevails," said the blogger, who signs his posts "Capitan-Blood" and lives in St. Petersburg.

Opinion polls in recent years bear him out. One showed that 94 percent of respondents believed that they could not influence events in Russia. According to another, 62 percent did not think that elections reflect the people's will.

Beyond staging a walkout in Parliament and a few demonstrations, opposition parties have done little to protest the election. Mr. Putin pronounced the voting generally fair, as did election regulators with close ties to the Kremlin.

Still, the evidence was hard to ignore.

Overall turnout was 18 percent in one Moscow district, and United Russia garnered 33 percent. In an adjacent district, turnout was 94 percent, and the party got 78 percent.

Sergey S. Mitrokhin, leader of Yabloko, a liberal party that lost both its council seats in the election, voted in District 192. So did his family and close friends.

On the district's official tally, Yabloko was listed as having received no votes.

#3

Biden Says Trip Has Laid Eastern Europe's 'Reset' Fears To Rest

By Abubakar Siddique, Brian Whitmore

RFE/RL, October 23, 2009

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden says he believes he has successfully laid to rest fears that the White House's efforts to improve relations with Russia could come at the expense of Washington's allies in Eastern Europe.

Biden made his comments in an exclusive interview with RFE/RL at the conclusion of a three-day visit to Eastern European capitals, where there is widespread apprehension about U.S. President Barack Obama's "reset" policy with Russia.

"I think I settled that. I don't believe that's the case now," Biden told RFE/RL on October 23 at the U.S. ambassador's residence in the Czech capital, Prague.

"We want to [hit] the reset button. But we did not press the erase button, the memory erase button," Biden said, adding that the administration has "made it absolutely clear" to Moscow that it will not tolerate any attempt to carve out a sphere of influence in the former Soviet space.

In addition to Prague, Biden's tour also took him to Warsaw and Bucharest earlier in the week. Poland and the Czech Republic, specifically, are worried that the U.S. administration's recent reconfiguration of its plans to base components of a missile-defense system in those countries represented a capitulation to Moscow.

The vice president also addressed fears in Eastern Europe that the Obama administration is neglecting the region, saying that in order for the United States to meet its "incredible, universal, worldwide obligations...we need a secure, whole, free Europe that is expanding."

Turning Point

In a wide-ranging interview, the vice president also commented on developments in Russia, the South Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.

Biden said Russia was at "one of those inflection points in history" where it was "deciding on its new identity, its new role." He added that he believed Moscow could move beyond the authoritarian rule and confrontational foreign policy that has prevailed in the Kremlin for the past decade.

"I look at Russia with eyes wide open, as a realist," Biden said. "And my expectation is that Russia will decide over the next decade that its interests lie in more integration, rather than what some in Russia seem to be thinking may be a different course. We just need to keep the dialogue going. But there are certain things that are not up for compromise with us."

The vice president also struck an upbeat tone regarding the volatile South Caucasus region, despite Russia's consolidation of its dominance over Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Biden pointed to Turkey's recent rapprochement with longtime foe Armenia, and progress toward a settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh, as causes for optimism.

"What's happening, from my perspective, is that people in the [South Caucasus] region are beginning to understand that their self-interest lies in greater cooperation now. Not out of love and affection, but out of necessity and opportunity," the vice president said.

Support For Afghanistan

Regarding Afghanistan, Biden dismissed as "not true" press reports suggesting that the administration's special envoy Richard Holbrooke is not welcome in Kabul. Holbrooke reportedly has had a strained relationship with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Biden also praised Karzai for agreeing to a November 7 runoff with his main challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, in Afghanistan's presidential election.

"The question is the trust of the Afghan people, and I think he has begun that process by agreeing to a runoff," Biden said. "This is about the Afghan people. This is not about us."

Biden said that, in Pakistan, he sees progress in the fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, despite the rising insecurity in the wake of major military offensives this year.

"The fact of the matter is, the new military operation is in direct response to the real, legitimate threats they see," Biden said, stressing that one positive sign is an agreement on a common policy between Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif.

"The [Pakistani] military is acting appropriately and they face a very difficult problem," Biden said.

Biden stressed that while the United States will continue assisting Pakistan in its efforts to fight violent extremism, Washington has no plans to send military forces to that country.

"We are prepared to be of whatever assistance they want us to be, not in terms of American forces, but in providing for their ability to deal with that," Biden said.

On Iran, Biden said that "we never have, and we never will" ignore concerns about democracy and human rights while negotiating the nuclear issue with Tehran.

"We believe that the bulk of the people of Iran are friendly toward the United States. They are not hostile, and they are going through a difficult period of deciding how to deal with their own government right now," Biden said.

"But it is in the interest of the world, it is in the interest in the people of Iran, it is in the interest of the people of Europe and the world, that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon," he said.

#4

Tymoshenko makes promise to IMF mission Reuters, October 22, 2009

Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko promised the visiting IMF mission to improve the country's finances, but the president remains skeptical.

(Reuters) – Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko on Oct. 20 promised a visiting International Monetary Fund mission to improve the country's finances, but President Victor Yushchenko sounded a skeptical note – a reflection of rows between the two rivals.

The mission from the IMF arrived last week to assess Ukraine's progress in fulfilling conditions set under the \$16.4 billion bailout, and to decide whether to release a tranche worth \$3.8 billion by the end of the year. The quarterly IMF reviews have been difficult – the fund delayed a second tranche for months earlier this year, but it has also shown flexibility as the crisis deepened.

The government has failed to make good on promises ahead of a presidential election on Jan. 17 in which Tymoshenko, Yushchenko and ex-premier Victor Yanukovych are expected to run.

"The situation in the finance sector is not easy, but there is political will amongst the government to stabilize it despite political factors and the start of the presidential campaign," Tymoshenko said in a statement after meeting the mission.

With support at just 3-4 percent, Yushchenko is not expected to be re-elected, while a harsh campaign will be waged between Tymoshenko and Yanukovych who are seen fighting head-to-head in the final round of voting in early February.

Yushchenko and Tymoshenko have quarreled bitterly in the past 18 months despite being allies during the 2004 "Orange Revolution" that brought both of them to power.

Wages Raised

Last month Yushchenko accused Tymoshenko of populism and uncontrollable spending. He said he was disappointed with the IMF for allowing the government to get away with its policies.

"If the IMF takes a principled position towards the measures that are being taken today, then maybe the plan will work," Yushchenko told a forum of foreign investors on Oct. 20.

"But if the plan would be one of technical replacement of reforms and the encouragement of a policy of waiting until the crisis ends, then this will be a tragedy for Ukraine," he added.

The IMF will complete its review on Oct. 26.

The government has refused to raise household gas prices – an unpopular move in the run up to the election but one that would have boosted the finances of state energy firm Naftogaz, which now saps the state coffers for support.

Some analysts have said the government will try to argue that by restructuring Naftogaz' foreign debts, it had relieved pressure on its finances, thus achieving the same aim as increased gas prices would have.

The IMF has also said it was displeased with a parliamentary bill that forced the central bank to place over \$1.2 billion of profits it has not yet made into this budget year's budget.

This bill came into force last week.

The IMF had amended some of its conditions since the bailout was agreed last November allowing a 2009 budget deficit of 6 percent of gross domestic product against an initial demand of a balanced budget.

Analysts think the budget deficit by the end of the year may balloon beyond that and beyond the 4 percent favored by the IMF for next year, as political parties seek to increase social spending ahead of the election.

Parliament on Oct. 20 approved a bill increasing the minimum wage, despite protests from Tymoshenko that it would be like placing "an atom bomb under the finances of the country."

The minimum wage will increase from Hr 744 (\$93.4) a month in November to Hr 869 in January and will continue to rise every quarter to Hr 922 (\$116) by the end of 2010. The average wage now is Hr 1,919 (\$240).

#5

Russia's Medvedev says open to election law ideas

By Gleb Bryanski

Reuters, October 24, 2009

MOSCOW - Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev told leaders of three opposition parties on Saturday he was open to ideas on how to change election laws that they say favor the pro-Kremlin party.

The Nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), Fair Russia and the Communist Party walked out of parliament this week in a rare act of protest against disputed regional elections, which independent observers say were rigged.

Russia's ruling party, United Russia, chaired by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, crushed opposition parties in the elections held across much of Russia, including Moscow.

The opposition parties want a rerun of the vote, an abolition of the early voting system, which the opposition says is prone to fraud, and the resignation of the central Election Commission's Chairman Vladimir Churov.

"I am ready to listen to these ideas ... Today we have a party list voting system, we can talk about it. I am open for dialogue," Medvedev said, adding he did not want the election debate to turn into "a funeral of democracy."

Kremlin political chief Vladislav Surkov, the architect of Russia's political and electoral system, which he refers to as "sovereign democracy," took part in Medvedev's meeting.

The election outcome and the scale of alleged fraud appear to have stunned even some parts of political establishment and was a reminder of the Soviet-era elections where only one party participated and voters had a choice of only one candidate.

Political scientists say the opposition parties, which do not pose a serious threat to the Kremlin, fear that they may lose their State Duma representation in the next election in 2011 if they do not take action now.

"We believe it is necessary to make serious changes to the election law," said Fair Russia leader Sergei Mironov after the meeting. The party leaders said Medvedev rejected the idea of an election rerun.

The Kremlin abolished direct elections of regional governors in 2004 as part of power centralization under President Vladimir Putin, and switched to a system where it picks a candidate and puts them forward for a vote in the local parliament.

"Governors, especially before their re-appointment, do everything they can to ensure a maximum positive result for the United Russia," Mironov said.

The Kremlin also set a 7 percent barrier for political parties contesting any election, a move which effectively barred smaller liberal pro-Western parties, supported by Russia's still relatively small middle class.

Medvedev said last year he was prepared to alter electoral law to allow some representation for parties that did not make it through the 7 percent barrier.

In his article entitled "Russia, forward" Medvedev projected a vision of a political system where different political parties replace each other at power and form the government, but in reality United Russia dominates political life.

Only three opposition deputies made it into the 35-seat Moscow City parliament after the October 11 vote. Sergei Mitrokhin, the leader of the small pro-Western Yabloko party, complained that even his own vote for his party was lost during the count.

#6

All Eyes on Medvedev's 'Go, Russia!' Speech

By Nabi Abdullaev

Moscow Times, October 26, 2009

It's a classic Catch-22.

President Dmitry Medvedev wants to modernize the country in what would demand political reforms and empowering of democratic institutions. This, in turn, would erode the Kremlin's vertical of power, which the country's rulers believe is their only tool to achieve policy goals, including Medvedev's desired modernization.

Medvedev's Sept. 10 article "Go, Russia!" - which he has proclaimed as the blueprint for his upcoming state-of-the-nation address and which many political pundits have described as the president's modernization manifesto - has stirred up a public reaction on an almost forgotten robustness and scale.

More than 13,000 comments have been left on Medvedev's blog, and scores of political analysts, spin doctors and even jailed Yukos tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky have published articles, arguing the merits of Medvedev's arguments.

In the article, Medvedev lamented that Russia has increasingly lagged behind developed countries in science, technology and economy. He identified the main hindrances to modernization as corruption, an economy based on exporting raw materials, and a mentality shared by many Russians of being a dependant.

In the meantime, Medvedev promised there would be no drastic personnel reshuffles within the bureaucracy or major changes in the country's political system. Modernization will be achieved mainly through state support of technical and business innovations, he said.

Medvedev himself has invited comments and suggestions from the public and some political and business leaders, and promised to integrate them into his second state-of-the-nation address, expected to be delivered in early November.

He also recently replaced the top Kremlin speechwriter of two previous presidents, Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, with his own appointee, in what some political observers view as a promise of a new policy shift.

While the run-up to the address marks a strong departure from the Kremlin's usual backstage procedures, the intermediate results are unimpressive.

Of all the political parties, only United Russia has been identified by Medvedev as contributing to the speech. Medvedev has selected two proposals from the ruling party, which were submitted last week: one on improving the situation in the wood-processing industry, and the other on easing punishments for tax arrears.

Medvedev told State Duma faction leaders in opening remarks before a closed-door meeting Saturday that he was looking forward to hearing their ideas for his speech.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov said afterward that he had pressed Medvedev to speak about the importance of maximizing the state's support for the economy and the democratization of political life in Russia.

Of the thousands of bloggers who have posted comments on Medvedev's blog, the president has singled out only one: Alexei Kucherenko, who calls himself a "futurologist" and "fascist" on his own blog, where he uses the pen name Maxim Kalashnikov. In his suggestion to Medvedev, Kucherenko calls on the president to create a "city of the future," a kind of a model urban settlement and network of farms that employs all kinds of technical innovations. Kucherenko also indicates that Medvedev should create a committee on innovations under the president.

Representatives of big companies submitted to Medvedev during a meeting Wednesday a more detailed plan of stimulating businesses to participate in the economic modernization of the country, including stronger protection for indebted companies during bankruptcy procedures, a better anti-monopoly law, and lower social taxes. Other suggestions included obliging state officials to order national innovative products and services, and a leveling of the playing field between state corporations and private companies. Of all the proposals, Medvedev supported only the last one at the meeting, on state corporations.

Medvedev's first deputy chief of staff, Vladislav Surkov, met Tuesday with members of the Public Chamber, a body created by then-President Vladimir Putin to provide feedback to the authorities from civil society. Surkov, widely believed to be the Kremlin's mastermind on domestic politics, explained to chamber members that Medvedev did not want drastic changes but an evolutionary modernization.

As for ideas related to political reforms, which many political scientists believe is essential for economic modernization, Medvedev has signaled that they are not likely to be accepted.

For example, in a litmus-test question about gubernatorial elections, Medvedev told the Valdai Club of Russia experts last month that he firmly opposed a return of the vote, scrapped by Putin in 2004.

While Medvedev spoke of problems with the court and law enforcement systems in his article, his record of dealing with them has not inspired hopes for more transparent and effective justice in Russia.

Medvedev has continued with a Putin-era practice of installing university buddies in top court positions, and in August he moved to slash the number of criminal charges that can be considered by jury trials.

After the latest regional elections on Oct. 11, which were widely criticized as rigged in favor of United Russia, Medvedev unflinchingly praised the party for its success.

Several responses to Medvedev's modernization idea have drawn considerable attention.

In one, Marina Litvinovich, a senior member of the opposition group United Civil Front, argued that the country's elite is incapable of becoming a motor of the modernization. Writing in Gazeta.ru on Wednesday, she called on embattled opposition groups to become a creative, rather than a critical, force and use the opportunity of Medvedev's desire to modernize to rise to prominence.

Also on Wednesday, Khodorkovsky said in an article published in Vedomosti that Medvedev would only achieve modernization if he moved to replace the country's corrupt and inert elite with the young entrepreneurs and professionals wishing to live in a country with developed democratic institutions. Otherwise, Medvedev's modernization rhetoric will be nothing more than "profanation," Khodorkovsky said.

While Khodorkovsky questioned Medvedev's sincerity, some political analysts said the president meant what he wrote.

"Medvedev is sincere when he speaks of modernization," said Stanislav Belkovsky, the president of the Institute of National Strategy, a think tank. "The problem is that he understands it as a way to revive the national economy without changing anything in the country's political system."

Historically, Russia has only seen revolutionary modernization that comes at huge human cost and a change in the system of the country's government, including the reforms pushed through by Peter the Great and Josef Stalin, Belkovsky said. Even Mikhail Gorbachev, who started perestroika in the mid-1980s to reform the economy but leave the Soviet political system largely intact, saw the whole process rapidly turn into a revolution, Belkovsky said.

Alexei Makarkin, a political analyst with the Center for Political Technologies, also noticed a similarity between the current situation and the last years of the Soviet Union, when the country's dependence on exports of raw materials stalled economic development.

"I believe that Medvedev wants economic reforms, but whether he has any resources to conduct them is the big question," he said.

That is why Medvedev chose not to question the declared victory of United Russia, which is one of the Kremlin's power tools, he said.

Medvedev has made few symbolic gestures to suggest that he wants a political modernization, said Alexander Morozov, an independent political analyst and the organizer of the Russian Internet's most prominent political discussion club.

"The president is weighing risks of starting political modernization, but at the moment the risk of losing control over the country outweighs other considerations," he said.

Medvedev could start political reforms if public forces were ready to support him actively, he said. "But Russian civil society has failed even to come up with a road map for political modernization," he said.

#7

Ukraine's High Stakes

By Yevgeny Kiselyov

Moscow Times, October 26, 2009

Although the Ukrainian presidential election campaign was officially kicked off last week, the political struggle began long before that. The two main challengers to President Viktor Yushchenko are Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Viktor Yanukovich, leader of the largest opposition party who lost the 2004 presidential race against Yushchenko.

Tymoshenko and Yanukovich started plastering the entire country with campaign posters and billboards several weeks ago. Yanukovich's billboards, which were done in a distinctly Soviet style, contain his portrait with the words: "It is important for me to know what you think. I will listen to everyone." A contact telephone number and e-mail address are displayed as proof. Voters who are nostalgic for the Soviet era will surely vote in large numbers for Yanukovich.

By contrast, Tymoshenko's election campaign is very creative, somewhat clever and modern. The campaign focuses on a larger-than-life figure who is referred to simply as "She," but whom everybody understands to be the one-and-only "iron lady" of Ukrainian politics. "She" alone works, while her opponents just twiddle their thumbs. "She" takes concrete actions while her critics blow hot air. "She" is fighting the economic crisis, while others make irresponsible promises. And so on. It is easy to predict that the campaign will end with a slogan along the lines of: "Ukraine needs only her." But Tymoshenko's opponents can at any moment flip the slogan to read, "Vote for anyone but her!"

As paradoxical as it might seem, many of the same people who during the Orange Revolution five years ago stood for days in downtown Kiev, protesting the falsified election results favoring Yanukovich and called for the new, fair elections today, see a January victory for Yanukovich as the best and last chance to stop Tymoshenko from achieving absolute control over the country. Many people who are personally acquainted with Tymoshenko are convinced that if she wins the elections, she will try to establish an authoritarian regime along the lines of the one built by Vladimir Putin. Some even contend that Tymoshenko openly admires Putin as a politician and wants to copy his policies. Many suspect that she would like to set strict loyalty rules with Ukraine's oligarchs, similar to the ones set by Putin after former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky was arrested and jailed, and to put the country's main media outlets - especially major television stations - under government control.

But Tymoshenko has been unable to cut the 12 percent lead that Yanukovich holds in all the polls over the past weeks. Barring an unusual turn of events - something those in Ukrainian political circles do not anticipate - this spread will remain in Yanukovich's favor for the near future. And yet, Tymoshenko is behaving as if she's got the elections in the bag. Is she bluffing or does she have something up her sleeve? And despite having ratings of only 3 percent, President Viktor Yushchenko sincerely believes that he will still be in office six months from now. He is so adamant on this point that many people find themselves involuntarily suspecting that Yushchenko also has some kind of underhanded plan to hold onto power. For example, he might be planning to declare a state of emergency on some pretext and then cite legal grounds for canceling or rescheduling elections.

Moreover, the campaign has been rife with scandals. Yushchenko's opponents have even claimed that the dioxin poisoning during the 2004 presidential race was fabricated to help him win the election. For some reason, law enforcement officials have never discovered who poisoned him, where it happened, when, why or under whose orders it was done. But it seemed as though everyone believed unconditionally that Yushchenko was poisoned by his adversaries. But the claims that the poisoning was staged are also intended to weaken Tymoshenko as well. After all, she was Yushchenko's comrade-in-arms during the Orange Revolution, and his poisoning was one of the main factors that led to his victory in the presidential race. If the Orange Revolution had not succeeded, Tymoshenko would not have become prime minister.

People are slinging mud at Yanukovich as well. He is accused of illegally privatizing a luxurious state-owned residence outside Kiev and is alleged to have committed a serious criminal offense. It is no secret that he served an 18-month jail sentence in the late 1960s on robbery and bodily injury charges. Now his opponents are trying to convince voters that there are other crimes Yanukovich is trying to conceal. Yanukovich supporters have simultaneously leveled charges of misconduct with minors against several parliamentary deputies from Tymoshenko's bloc. The unpleasant Artek sex scandal, so far based on hearsay, rumors and gossip, is widening daily. And that is only the beginning, as there are still more than two months left before the January election.

The stakes are high - and not only for Ukraine. Moscow has a huge interest in who will become Ukraine's next president since Ukraine remains the most important component in the Kremlin's ambitious plans to restore its influence in the former Soviet republics.

Yevgeny Kiselyov is a political analyst and hosts a political talk show on Inter television in Ukraine.

#8

Is Natan Sharansky Jewish Agency's last, best hope?

By Dina Kraft

JTA, October 26, 2009

JERUSALEM - Fresh in his post as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Natan Sharansky stood before the organization's leaders in the same dimly lit Jerusalem hotel ballroom where they have been gathering for years and offered up the promise of his star power and vision to help save the day.

Eschewing the usual talk of the agency's flailing budget, which is now in a deeper crisis than ever, the former Soviet dissident and Jewish world hero spoke instead of returning to the Jewish Agency's ideological roots of aliyah and Jewish identity, and reinvigorating the Diaspora-Israel divide.

But in order to meet these lofty goals, Sharansky first must meet another challenge: the drastic downturn in funding from the Jewish Federations of North America (formerly the United Jewish Communities), which has had an especially crippling effect on the agency's work in the former Soviet Union.

His main effort on that front, Sharansky told JTA, would be fund raising intensively among Russian-speaking Jews.

"The time has come for the Jewish community there to take responsibility for their own Jewish institutions," Sharansky said in a brief interview following his opening address to the agency's board of governors meeting Sunday.

How Sharansky, who has promised no further cuts to the 2010 budget, will achieve this is not clear.

Jewish Agency board members are hopeful Sharansky will be able to deliver on promises to meet the cut in federation funding, which is expected to reach at least \$15 million in 2010. In 2009, the federations gave the Jewish Agency \$120 million, though the initial budget allocation was \$138 million.

The situation is so dire that the Jewish Agency's treasurer sent out an e-mail several months ago to the board of governors suggesting the agency was in danger of going bankrupt.

According to agency officials, core budget funding to the former Soviet Union has dropped from \$17 million in 2002 to \$3 million for 2010.

Sharansky's plan is not only to turn to Russian-speaking community members in the hope that they will become the financial backbone of the agency's endeavors in the former Soviet Union, but to intensively lobby North American Jewish communities on a fund-raising drive. His immediate plans are for a 12-city tour in North America to convince federations to restore their cuts to funding for the agency.

"The money is there and we can tap into it," said Carole Solomon, a former chair of the agency's board.

Solomon suggested that Jewish philanthropy was being diluted as organizations and foundations give to individual, smaller projects instead of big organizations such as the Jewish Agency, known by the acronym JAFI.

"Sharansky is a unique emissary of the Jewish people and can help redirect those funds as more and more people come to understand the validity of the Jewish Agency," she said.

Harvey Wolfe, a board member from Montreal, agreed.

"This is a man who was in prison for years whose freedom came in part from the battles waged by the Jewish world, including the Jewish Agency, and now he is the chairman of the Jewish Agency himself," he said. "Who better than him to now represent JAFI to the Jewish world?"

When it comes to the former Soviet Union, Michael Chlenov, a veteran of the Jewish community in Moscow who happened to be Sharansky's first Hebrew teacher back in 1973, voiced some skepticism.

"The fact that Sharansky is in this position is definitely positive," he said. "But from the Russian point of view, JAFI was practically killed off in the last year because of the successive cuts. Jews in the FSU have begun to question JAFI's role in the community as an important organization.

"The symbolism of Sharansky as chairman does give hope, but how he will pull off the challenge is not so simple. It's not clear if people will put money into an organization some consider half-dead."

Chlenov, an anthropology professor and secretary general of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, advised the Jewish Agency to make sure to balance its focus on aliyah with Jewish community building if it wants to boost itself in the eyes of Jews in the former Soviet Union.

At a meeting of the Jewish Agency's FSU Committee, the focus was on the prospect of saving programming there on a shoestring budget. Due to cuts, the number of emissaries working in the region has been slashed dramatically. During the 2008-09 budget year, there were 200 agency emissaries, or schlichim, in smaller communities. For 2009-10, the number has been reduced to 90. The idea of mobile emissaries has been instituted to help fill the void, officials said.

Agency-run ulpan Hebrew classes had their funding cut entirely. The ulpanes that survived were kept afloat by students who could afford to pay tuition.

Alex Katz, who heads the agency's FSU department, painted a dire picture.

"There is chaos when it comes to decision-making," he said.

Katz argued for more involvement by local Jewish community members and for not relying on direction from Israeli staff members.

Michael Yedovitsky, who heads the agency's education programs in the former Soviet Union, also argued for local Jewish leaders to be more involved in planning and running programs. He described the past year as a "struggle to minimize the damage of the cuts, a year of rescue, of preservation."

Later, in an interview with JTA, Yedovitsky said, "This past year was like the Battle for Moscow. But next year will be like the Battle for Stalingrad." The fighting in Moscow in World War II was about holding the line, but the battle in Stalingrad was a turning point in the war.

For his part, Sharansky himself stressed the importance he staked of maintaining high-quality programs, including those related to Jewish identity and Zionist education in the former Soviet Union.

"I have seen the results of the agency's 20 years of work in the region," he said, "but also the tragic consequences of stopping them in the middle."

#9
Sharansky vows not to cut JA budget
By Haviv Rettig Gur
Jerusalem Post, October 26, 2009

This week's Jewish Agency Board of Governors meeting in Jerusalem is the first in many years that won't be discussing significant cuts to the organization's budget.

In an effort to refocus the organization away from its shrinking financial base and to bolster the sense of mission among its educators and activists, agency chairman Natan Sharansky has vowed not to make any new budget cuts in 2010.

"We can't keep bleeding and still plan for the future," he told The Jerusalem Post on Monday.

Asked how the agency would make up the expected deficit for 2010, estimated at several million dollars, Sharansky said he was "counting on us raising enough money. First we have to guarantee that [donor organizations like] the UJC and Keren Hayesod will raise the same funds they gave last year. This is hard when every Jewish organization is reporting a tougher year than last."

The agency was also "looking for new sources of funding," he added.

And the government could step in to make up the shortfall, Sharansky said. He said he has met with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on the issue. "I'm in negotiations to make sure that the government will help when it's necessary."

Just hours after the end of the Board of Governors gathering on Tuesday, Sharansky will fly abroad on a whirlwind tour of dozens of federations and communities seeking to make up the budget shortfall.

According to Jewish Agency Finance Department figures, the current annual budget of the agency is \$260m. This is a cut of some \$60m. from as recently as 2007.

Such "dramatic" cuts harm the agency's ability to carry out its mission, said Sharansky.

"I was in Ukraine recently, and I almost cried about the drop in programming" caused by the budget cuts. "The number of students in classes or pupils in summer programs has plummeted. With all due respect to the deficit, it's also important not to make the organization irrelevant."

Sharansky also announced the mobilization of a major new outreach project to overseas university campuses with large numbers of Jews at the Board of Governors meeting on Monday. The program, which will send some 100 emissaries over the next two years to campuses in North America, where some 80 percent of Diaspora Jews live, reflects the central Jewish Agency mission of "strengthening the ties between Diaspora Jews and the State of Israel," he told the agency board's Committee for Combating Anti-Semitism.

The initiative marks a dramatic increase from the current figure of just 20 emissaries, who serve on campuses in cooperation with Hillel.

"In his recent visits to North America, [Sharansky] was witness to a worrying phenomenon: Jewish students rejecting all contact with the State of Israel in the wake of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic attacks on it on campuses," read a statement by the Jewish Agency explaining the new program.

The emissaries will be trained by senior international experts on issues of activism, international law and hasbara (public diplomacy), including Canadian MP, professor and former justice minister Irwin Cotler and Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz.

#10
Uproar Over Election Fraud Ends in a Fizzle
By Nikolaus von Twickel
Moscow Times, October 27, 2009

Two weeks after the unprecedented walkout of the State Duma's three opposition parties, little seems left of the whiff of democracy that surfaced so suddenly.

President Dmitry Medvedev appeared to yield to their demands over the weekend, meeting with leaders of the Just Russia, Liberal Democrat and the Communist parties to discuss Oct. 11 regional elections that they say were blatantly falsified in favor of the ruling United Russia party.

But the outcome of Saturday's talks resembled a fizzle after the uproar that led to it: Medvedev declared that the country was moving forward on the path of democracy and that he was open to changing election laws favoring United Russia. And opposition party leaders said they were happy with that.

The Kremlin also downplayed the meeting's emergency character, rebranding it as a routine roundtable between the president and the heads of the Duma's four factions, including United Russia, that had been originally scheduled for Tuesday.

Medvedev also placed the disputed elections low on the agenda, focusing rather on the country's proposals to the Group of 20 and his planned state-of-the-nation address.

The result seemed to give credence to skeptics' claims that the Duma walkout was a Kremlin-orchestrated affair.

"This was just a demonstration to make us believe that apparently we have democracy and democratic procedures," Ilya Yashin, a leading member of the Solidarity opposition movement, told The Moscow Times.

All participants of Saturday's meeting were positive about it afterward, and even Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who led the Oct. 14 walkout, said he thought it was "excellent."

Yashin said this merely showed that the Duma opposition parties had been co-opted by the Kremlin. "These are systemic parties that coordinate their actions with the presidential administration," he said.

The opposition factions have denied working with the Kremlin in the past.

Yashin said Medvedev should not be judged by his words but by his actions. "He has been president 1 1/2 years, and he is effectively continuing the tough course set by Putin, despite his talk about liberalization," he said.

Dmitry Oreshkin, an analyst with the Mercator think tank, said Medvedev's words ultimately mattered little.

"What he said is absolutely unimportant. What is important is that three loyal, systemic opposition parties suddenly and publicly demonstrated that the elections were rigged. That is a new feature in politics," he said.

But Oreshkin refuted the idea that the walkout had been orchestrated, calling it the "spontaneous action" of parties who are fearful of losing political representation in the future.

He said the scandal ultimately had to fade away like it did because Medvedev could not dismantle the system set up by his predecessor and mentor, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. "He can just express his sympathy. That's all," he said.

Oleg Shein, a Duma deputy with A Just Russia who was a leading advocate of the walkout after losing the mayoral election in his native Astrakhan against the incumbent from United Russia, said the Kremlin needed to act against vote-rigging in the regions.

"If they do not act now, regional bureaucrats, and not the federal center, will set the agenda one year from now," he said Monday, speaking by telephone from Astrakhan.

"It is very important to understand that stability depends on this," he said.

Regional leaders like Mayor Yury Luzhkov and Dagestani President Mukhu Aliyev found themselves in the hot seat after the opposition and even senior officials claimed massive fraud in the Oct. 11 elections.

The Kremlin had urged Luzhkov in advance not to obstruct opposition parties from running. But at the same time, the Kremlin had made it clear that regional bosses' careers were linked to how United Russia fared at the ballot box. Medvedev has fired governors after United Russia garnered poor election results.

Luzhkov has been quick to dismiss speculation that United Russia's sweeping 66 percent victory in Moscow City Duma elections could be used to cripple him politically, telling reporters that he was one of the party's founders and that he had no intention of leaving.

#11
The Dissident Who Came In From the Cold
By Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova
Newsweek, November 2, 2009

Nikita Belykh is radically remaking Russia's vast Kirov region. The country's democratic future may depend on his success.

Dozens of villagers are lined up at the gates of the decrepit local boatyard on a breezy Saturday morning to witness an unheard-of event. They gaze in wonder as the visitor arrives: never in living memory has a regional governor paid a call to the backwater town of Arkul, on the Vyatka River, roughly 500 miles northeast of Moscow. Climbing out of his battered Land Cruiser in scuffed jeans and a New York Yankees cap, Nikita Belykh makes a startling contrast to Russia's standard-issue provincial bureaucrats.

Looks are the least of the differences: Belykh made his name opposing those entrenched post-Soviet apparatchiks as one of the most determined pro-democracy activists in the country. Old friends were shocked and angry when he abruptly abandoned their street protests and took a Kremlin appointment as governor of Kirov oblast, deep in Russia's neglected heartland. But Belykh is tackling his new job with all the energy he used to radiate as an opposition leader. He immediately begins peppering the boatyard's director with questions-especially about what needs fixing. "Tell me what you do!" Belykh says briskly. "Tell me everything!"

The shipyard is one small piece of an experiment he hopes will transform Russia-and so far, at least, he has the blessing of no less than Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev. It was Medvedev who appointed Belykh to the job late last year, essentially granting him a socioeconomic laboratory slightly larger than England. Kirov is a microcosm of Russia and its problems-chronic unemployment, decaying Soviet infrastructure and wretched public-health conditions, to name only three. Medvedev has made it clear that Kirov is his personal project and Belykh his protege. If Belykh can raise Kirov up from its knees, there will be a clear precedent for applying the same management style across Russia. "Maybe some people would like to see us liberals fail," says Belykh. "My job is to prove the opposite."

And fast. Medvedev publicly deplores Russia's economic plight and has called for massive changes, but he may not have much longer to do anything about it. Former president Vladimir Putin, the KGB veteran who chose him as successor, recently dropped broad hints that he intends to take the presidency back at the next election, in 2012. Worse yet for both Medvedev and Belykh, hostility toward the Kirov project is growing, even within Medvedev's (and Putin's) own United Russia party. Two weeks ago the party's youth wing, the Young Guards, marched against Belykh's plan to hold a conference on regional development in Kirov. Whipped up by false rumors that the conference was sponsored by the U.S. International Republican Institute, the protesters carried professionally made banners with slogans like GET OUT WASHINGTON ORGANIZERS! and YANKEE GO HOME! They displayed no qualms about publicly attacking Medvedev's protege-a sign of bigger challenges ahead.

But Belykh seems undeterred. Even by the standards of Russian democratic activists, he has a mind of his own. He grew up in a well-educated family near the Urals city of Perm. His parents expected him to study at one of the top schools in Moscow, but when he was 16 his father died of a heart attack, and Belykh stayed in Perm to look after his mother. That was the year Boris Yeltsin stood atop a tank and defied an attempted coup by hardliners trying to roll back democratic reforms. To this day, Russia's first post-Soviet president remains Belykh's hero. "I come from a generation of Yeltsin democrats," he says. "Nobody else but Yeltsin dared to give people freedom in the conditions Russia lived in the 1990s. Unfortunately we did not manage to keep that hard-won freedom." Belykh adds, "Now our job is to rehabilitate democracy."

A high flier from the start, Belykh majored in law and economics simultaneously at Perm State. At 23 he was made vice president of a local investment house, and at 28 he was appointed the region's vice governor. The next year-2003-he ran for Parliament on the reformist Union of Right Forces ticket, but the tide had turned against the progressives: the party won no seats at all. Belykh stuck with the party anyway and moved to Moscow to become its leader, but times grew even tougher, and members began talking about making peace with Putin. Belykh opposed any such idea. "I did not see myself as a part of the Kremlin's project," he recalls. He quit the party in protest.

Putin's strong-arm tactics had effectively neutered Russia's liberal opposition. And yet Belykh couldn't just stand by while the country deteriorated. While Putin has won heavy domestic support with his loud, aggressive foreign policy, Russia is hollowing out inside. Reform at the local level gets no attention, but it's essential if the country is ever to thrive.

That's where Belykh decided to focus his efforts. He passed a message to Medvedev that he wanted to work in regional government. He knew his old associates would accuse him of selling out, but he saw no other way he could make a difference. He was still struggling with himself when Medvedev suggested making him governor of Kirov. The Kremlin wasn't taking chances. Belykh's first interview was with Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin's chief ideologist, who warned him to keep his mouth shut in public about national issues like the war with Georgia. Belykh would be permitted to do a weekly radio show called A Governor's Diary on the liberal Moscow-based Radio Echo network-but only if the program stayed away from "provocative" questions.

The new governor arrived in Kirov in January. One of the first things he did was hang a portrait of Boris Yeltsin on his office wall. Then he auctioned off his predecessor's official car, a Lexus. He allowed all street protests to go ahead, including a thinly attended gay pride parade, and announced he was ready to meet with any group that had a beef with the government. He's been working 12-hour days ever since, mainly talking with people about their grievances.

Kirov has no shortage of complaints. Unemployment is set to reach 20 percent by the end of the year. The oblast's sole gasoline distributor, Lukoil, uses its monopoly to demand the highest prices in the entire Volga federal region. Infrastructure and public utilities are a constant source of outrage. And as almost everywhere in Russia, the demographics are a disaster: between January and August 2008 (the most recent statistics available) Kirov recorded 10,474 births and 16,204 deaths in a total population of 1.5 million. On top of that, an estimated 15,000 people left last year to seek better lives elsewhere.

But what seems even more baffling to Belykh is that Kirov's people seem stuck in the old ways of dealing with a hostile bureaucracy. "For the first time in my life I find myself on the same side of the barricades as the government," he says in frustration. At one recent meeting, he struck a deal with local labor chiefs on job security and keeping factories open-and the next day, they published an open letter excoriating him for trying to cut teachers' salaries. In another instance, a group of local NGOs organized street protests against high utility rates only a day after Belykh gathered their leaders in his office to find a solution to exactly that problem. "I want to say to them: 'People, I am much more experienced with protests than all of you. Here I am, your governor, come in and find solutions together with me!'"

But the single biggest challenge may be the region's law-enforcement system. Local NGOs have documented dozens of police-brutality charges, including numerous alleged cases of anal rape in police custody. At least four alleged victims have registered complaints with prosecutors. Nevertheless, victims who were interviewed by NEWSWEEK insisted on closing their curtains and speaking in whispers for fear of retribution. Few have

much hope that Belykh will prevail over the local security forces. "There are areas which neither Belykh nor even President Medvedev can change," says one of the victims' lawyers, asking not to be named criticizing the police. "I have lived a long life in the Russian law-enforcement system and can assure you, it lives by its own rules."

Belykh has asked all his old activist friends to join his team in Kirov, but few are willing to relocate so far from the social and cultural mainstream. Even his wife and their three children remain in Moscow, where she manages a travel agency. (Their eldest son, 6-year-old Yuri, started school there in September because Belykh didn't want the boy tagged by Kirov classmates as "the governor's son.") One activist friend who has accepted the invitation is Maria Gaidar, 27, the daughter of Yeltsin's acting prime minister back in 1992, Yegor Gaidar. She once rappelled down the side of the Great Stone Bridge just outside the Kremlin, to unfurl a banner declaring NO TO KGB POWER. When Belykh accepted the Kirov job, she excoriated him for "selling his soul to the devil" but then relented. Another old friend from the opposition, Konstantin Arzamastsev, had to think hard before joining the team. "Only my respect for Belykh made me take this job," he says. "Kirov is far from being an easy place to liberalize."

After months of wrangling, Belykh has managed to appoint eight deputies, but almost every other member of his government is a holdover from the old regime. Kirov's legislature has blocked other appointments. By law the governor is also entitled to nominate a senator to represent Kirov in the Federation Council, but Belykh's pick was vetoed by Medvedev himself. "They made Belykh governor without letting him put together a team of his own," says an aide to Nikolai Shaklein, the senator who was named instead, requesting anonymity when discussing his bosses.

Nevertheless, Belykh insists on running the place his way—as democratically as possible. He keeps his advisers working practically nonstop and has them debate all sides of any issue before he makes a decision on it. "We plan to turn this region into the most transparent, corruption-free, and business-friendly region in Russia," says Gaidar. "But that is a long way off. We face a wall of Soviet mentality that has not changed in 20 years." Sometimes it seems nearly impossible. "On my worst days I think it is easier to rule like an Asian despot than to become a Russian Obama," Belykh says. "But look, to me this job is a chance to change people's attitudes about democratic values."

Changing those attitudes in Kirov alone will take "a social revolution," Belykh says. First, people need to see tangible benefits in their lives. "The level of trust for liberals in Putin's Russia has shrunk to almost zero," says Belykh. Even so, Medvedev has shown plenty of trust in him. This May the president became the first Russian leader to visit the oblast since Tsar Alexander I in 1824. Medvedev didn't merely put in an appearance; with Belykh at his side, he announced a crowd-pleasing new plan to pay newly unemployed Russians a full year's benefits to help them launch new businesses. "I am Medvedev's man," says Belykh. "I am his appointee, on his team. And not anybody else's." The question is how far the leader of that team can go to make Belykh's experiment a success.

#12

Russia becomes the world's taxicab to space

By Fred Weir

Christian Science Monitor, October 26, 2009

Though its program is nothing like it once was, the country uses its fleet of rockets to ferry tourists and satellites into orbit.

For better or mirth, it has become one of those indelible images from space: Canadian circus billionaire Guy Laliberte floating around the International Space Station wearing a red clown nose.

The stunt earlier this month by the founder of Cirque du Soleil, who once performed as a fire breather, was intended to provide a moment of levity for his wife and children during a video linkup. But it also served a more serious purpose: to draw attention to the crusade for which he paid \$35 million to journey into orbit – the need for clean water on Earth.

Mr. Laliberte is the seventh space tourist to be sent aloft on Russian rockets. His odyssey, now over, shows how much the Russian space program has evolved since the pioneering days of Sputnik a half century ago, when the country's technological prowess was both the envy – and vexation – of the West.

Though hardly the juggernaut it was at the height of the cold war, the Russian space program today is also not just a cosmic limousine for wealthy clowns. In recent years, it has become something of a taxicab for spacefaring nations around the world.

Earlier this month, no fewer than three Soyuz spacecraft were docked at the International Space Station (ISS). During the recent grounding of US space shuttles, both Soyuz and Progress missions were essential to keeping the ISS going. At the same time, the Russians remain active in the satellite launch business. "This year we will have 44 flights, which is more than we had last year, and we spend less per flight than the Americans do," says Alexander Voro-byov, press secretary of RosKosmos, showing a touch of the old Russian pride.

The Russians are keeping a hand in unmanned space exploration as well. Future plans include Luna-Glob, a much-delayed lunar probe that is now slated to go up in 2012. Phobos-Grunt, a return probe to gather rock and soil samples from the Martian moon Phobos, now scheduled for 2011 (it had been slated to take off this month). And there is the proposed Venera-D probe to map Venus, slated for 2016.

Rising budgets have undergirded this activity. Starting in 2005, the government increased outlays to RosKosmos as the economy stabilized and oil revenues increased during the Putin years. For 2009, the budget is still at that higher level of around \$2.5 billion, though no one is sure this can be maintained if the economic crisis continues.

"The situation in our national space industry is extremely difficult, but we hope for better times," says Igor Lisov, a columnist with Novosti Kosmonavtiki, a leading Russian journal of space science. "We manage to sell some flights [space tourism], but this really doesn't bring in much income. We've begun making a good business lofting communications satellites, and our own work goes on."

It is true that the Russian program remains a hologram of what it once was. During Soviet times, the space program was funded on par with NASA. With the fall of the USSR, the rubles dried up. The 1990s, in fact, were marked by many humiliations. For example, one copy of the Buran space shuttle, the Soviet Union's answer to the US space shuttle, ended up as a children's attraction in Moscow's Gorky Park, where it still sits beside the Moscow River, gathering fungus and looking forlorn.

The Mir space station, one of the most successful and long-lived (15 years) Soviet-era projects, had to be supported by private contributions, and there was talk of selling it off, perhaps to be an orbiting TV studio. In 2001, it was finally brought down and dumped into the South Pacific. It was this period that saw RosKosmos turn to moneymaking schemes such as satellite launches and space tourism.

"Much has been lost to us already, after many years of catastrophic neglect, and a lot will have to be rebuilt from the ground up," says Mr. Lisov. "Our space industry still relies on the old personnel, and it does not offer the kind of salaries that would attract talented young people. That will need to change if the space program is to have a future."

Still, RosKosmos retains a lot of Soviet-era space assets, such as Baikonur (which is in Kazakhstan) and other space launch centers. Star City, near Moscow, is a very impressive complex for training cosmonauts and controlling missions. Talk remains active here about a successor to the ISS, new generations of Russian rockets – the new Angara family, supposedly coming soon – and even a manned mission to Mars. But no one thinks 20th century-style space achievements will be possible without a whole new level of international cooperation.

#13

Helsinki Commissioners Push for Greater U.S. Promotion of OSCE Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, October 28, 2009

WASHINGTON — The U.S. must play a more active role in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to advance U.S. interests and bolster the world's largest regional security organization, leaders of the U.S. Helsinki Commission urged three assistant secretaries of state and defense at a Commission hearing today.

U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin, (D-MD), Chairman of the Commission and Co-Chairman Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) convened the hearing "Advancing U.S. Interests in the OSCE Region" ahead of a meeting of foreign ministers to take place in Greece in December.

"We are surrounded by events that demand strong U.S. leadership within the OSCE, not only to advance U.S. interests but to uphold the international principles reflected in international commitments," Chairman Cardin said. "From simmering tensions in the Caucasus and frozen conflicts, to concerns in the Balkans and the impasse with Moscow over weapons treaties, there are no shortage of reminders of the need for the U.S. to play a more assertive role in the OSCE."

"Whether we are looking at issues of territorial integrity or sovereignty, freedom of expression or environmental cooperation, our responsibility is to prevent the erosion of core OSCE principles; to support the efforts of human rights defenders and others working to realize peaceful change; and to draw attention to violations when and where they occur. In this regard, I cannot exaggerate the importance of the U.S. leading by example," Co-Chairman Hastings said.

The hearing examined ways the U.S. could advance foreign policy priorities with testimony from Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs; Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; and Alexander Vershbow, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

#14

World Union Delivers on its Promise and Dedicates New Moscow Center World Union for Progressive Judaism, October 29, 2009

World Union for Progressive Judaism recently opened L'dor v'Dor (From Generation to Generation), a new Jewish community center and synagogue in the heart of Moscow. The event marks the completion of the first stage of a World Union building commitment to the growth of Progressive Judaism in the FSU.

The Moscow center was dedicated in a joyous ceremony on October 8. From the opening shofar blast it was the true celebration of a dream realized, proving that at a time when other Jewish organizations are cutting back, the World Union is one of the few that is delivering on what it promises – clear evidence of a true commitment to its mission statement: "To build and connect Progressive Jewish communities worldwide."

"While many other Jewish organizations are struggling to reinvent themselves, focusing on survival and restructuring, I am happy to report that the World Union for Progressive Judaism has stayed true to our mission and maintained focus on our core values," said Steve Bauman, the organization's chairman.

Rabbi Sasha Lyskovoy provides a traditional blast of the shofar (left) before World Union chairman Steve Bauman delivers greetings.

The six donors who made this remarkable achievement possible were Sue and Jimmy Klau, and Anne Molloy and Henry Posner III from the USA, who funded the purchase; and Ed and Svetlana Kaufman from Moscow, who underwrote the renovation.

With them at the Thursday evening dedication ceremony were Israeli Ambassador Anna Azari; World Union leaders Steve and Ina Bauman, Austin and Nani Beutel, Jim Heeger and Darryl Messenger; Steve Schwager, chief executive of the Joint Distribution Committee; Michael Steiner, representing the Pittsburg Federation; World Union professional staff members Shai Pinto, Rabbi Joel Oseran, Alex Kagan, and FSU-based rabbis Sasha Lyskovoy and Leonid Bimbat; as well as over 120 invited congregational and community leaders and dignitaries from the FSU and abroad.

There were also greetings by Ambassador Azari; Irina Cherban, chair of the Union of Congregations for Progressive Judaism in Russia; and Novruz Mamedov and Gene Moldavsky, local Jewish leaders and supporters of the project; and special moments of recognition of the principal contributors.

The dedication was followed by Shabbat and Simchat Torah worship the next evening and on Saturday.

"It was a wonderful sight to watch Sue and Jimmy, Anne and Henry, and Svetlana and Ed, along with Nani and Austin Beutel, and both Rabbi Sasha Lyskovoy and Rabbi Leonid Bimbat, carry the Torah scrolls under a tallit chupah into the sanctuary as we began the first ever religious service to take place in our new Moscow home," said to Rabbi Joel Oseran, World Union vice president for international development. "It was a wonderful occasion made all the more special by the fact that Austin and Nani were able to carry the very same Torah scroll they delivered to our Moscow congregation nearly 10 years ago as a gift from their home congregation, Temple Sinai of Toronto."

The Thursday dedication ceremony launched the new facility, Oseran added, "but the Shabbat and Simchat Torah celebrations that followed truly brought it to life."

#15

Russia's political murders: When was the last time that killings of human rights activists were so blatant, and so common?

Editorial

Washington Post, October 29, 2009

MURDERS OF human rights activists in Russia have been happening with such frequency that some will be tempted to shrug at the brutal slaying on Sunday of Maksharip Aushev, who campaigned against abuses by the security forces in the Caucasian republic of Ingushetia. Mr. Maksharip was driving on a major highway, in broad daylight, when a car pulled up beside him and delivered a fusillade of bullets. His funeral came two months after that of Zarema Sadulayeva, the head of a children's charity in neighboring Chechnya, and her husband, who were shot and stuffed in a car trunk. Those murders, in turn, followed the July 15 killing of Natalya Estemirova, Chechnya's most prominent human rights activist.

No one has been arrested, much less held responsible, in any of these cases. No one has been charged for the murder last Jan. 19 of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, who were gunned down on a busy street just blocks from the Kremlin. The murderers of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was assassinated outside her Moscow apartment three years ago this month, remain at large. These courageous men and women had in common their effort to hold Russian security forces accountable for the extrajudicial killings, torture and rape of innocent civilians in Chechnya, Ingushetia and other Caucasus republics.

Russia leader Vladimir Putin has been shrugging at this gangsterism all along. He disparaged Ms. Politkovskaya, one of the country's most renowned journalists, shortly after her death, and he's had nothing to say about the recent killings. President Dmitry Medvedev has been a little more responsive, expressing regrets and once meeting with editors of the newspaper where Ms. Politkovskaya and Ms. Baburova worked. But he doesn't seem to have much influence over his country's security forces. A year ago Mr. Medvedev replaced the governor of Ingushetia after Mr. Aushev led protests against the killing of an opposition journalist. But the new governor was powerless to stop the latest assassination, which he blamed on "power-wielding structures."

Everyone in Russia knows who he is talking about: the lawless gunmen commanded by the Kremlin-backed ruler of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and the Federal Security Service, which is the successor to Mr. Putin's KGB. Russians also know that Mr. Putin could put a stop to the state-sponsored murders if he chose to; he does not. This is not new, of course. Past Kremlin rulers have used murder to shore up their authority. Not since the time of Joseph Stalin, however, have the political killings been so blatant - or so chillingly common.

#16

Moving Beyond Russia's Embrace

By Irina Severin

RFE/RL, October 29, 2009

Russia enjoys dabbling in the domestic politics of its neighboring countries, publicly supporting its favorite politicians and demonstrating its contempt for those whom it dislikes. But it rarely - at least among its European neighbors - gets the result it is seeking. The most recent example is Moldova.

The Kremlin spared no effort to support the Communist Party during the parliamentary elections in April and again in July. But the result is that the party lost power. Worse, although it retains 48 seats in the 101-seat legislature (the largest single faction), no other faction was willing to enter into a coalition with the darlings of the Kremlin.

Now, apparently, the Kremlin is looking toward parliament speaker Marian Lupu, who defected from the Communists this summer to head the Democratic Party in the July elections and is now the ruling coalition's favored candidate for president.

When Russian President Dmitry Medvedev was in Chisinau recently for a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), he refused to meet with Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, but found time to chat with the amiable young Lupu. Medvedev went a step further in making Lupu stand out by also refusing to meet Moldova's new prime minister, Vlad Filat. He, evidently, was being punished for daring to mention the word "NATO" a couple of times.

Poisoned Chalice?

To be fair, Lupu did everything he could to attract Medvedev's attention by sending as many positive signals as he could think of. But even he was surprised at the unexpected attention he received. When Medvedev offered to pose with Lupu for photographers, the latter looked decidedly lost.

Perhaps that was because he realized at that moment what this honor might end up costing him. After all, he must have noticed how Moscow's "yesterday man," former President Vladimir Voronin requested a meeting with Medvedev and was turned down. Voronin had to leave the country during the summit to minimize his humiliation. And one wonders if Medvedev really thought that such a demonstrative affront to the old favorite was really a good way to convince Lupu to get on board with Moscow.

Moldova's current political deadlocks stems from the fact that the four other parliament factions cannot muster the 61 votes needed to elect a president. The coalition needs eight votes, which the Communists can offer - as the democrats offered their votes to elect Voronin as a president in 2005 to avoid early elections. Lupu has support among the Communists, but the final decision depends on Voronin.

And did Medvedev's gesture help Lupu in his uneasy attempt to build a dialogue with the Communists? After the summit, the party's official newspaper "Communist" wrote: "Marian Lupu's picture against the background of Medvedev won't help him become president." And Voronin declared unambiguously that the Communists will not offer their votes to Lupu.

It seems the Communists have once again found the dignity that they demonstrated under Russian pressure in the 2005 elections, which they won. But the Communists have been unable to modernize themselves - or the

country that they ruled for eight years -sufficiently to gain genuine support among the electorate. This inevitably forces them to rely on Russian support and makes them vulnerable to Russian influence.

Meanwhile, although the Alliance for European Integration continues to insist that Lupu is its candidate for president, his pro-Western partners must be somewhat confused by Medvedev's demonstration of support and are likely wondering privately what kind of political favors Russia might expect from a President Lupu.

Basking In A Manufactured Glow

Why are politicians in the former Soviet countries so eager to have their picture taken with the president of Russia? For the most part, Russia's neighbors associate Russia with unexpected gas cuts, gas-price increases, and painful embargoes that produce misery throughout society. So there is a certain part of the electorate that seeks to avoid these punishments at any cost and wants a leader who can appease this uncontrollable force of nature.

The size of this segment of the electorate is hard to estimate. The Kremlin has agencies in its neighboring countries, such as Eurasian Monitor (a project of the Kremlin-controlled All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion), that are working to improve Russia's image and its standings in the polls. Of course, such polls are primarily intended not to reflect public opinion, but to shape it.

The Kremlin uses the same technique at home - controlling the media in order to frame issues in the "correct" way and then producing polls, studies, and "expert" opinions that bolster this impression. Judging from some of the comments coming from Russian leaders, it would appear that often the rulers themselves begin to believe the storylines they craft.

Marian Lupu, it seems, fell victim to a desire to share in the Russian leader's apparent popularity. But by doing so, he has placed his presidential ambitions in grave danger. By comparison, it seems Ukraine's Yushchenko made a rare appearance at the CIS summit precisely in order to be snubbed by Medvedev and to give his abysmal popularity rating at home a little bounce - not exactly the result Russia was seeking.

Maybe it is finally becoming clear that politicians in the former Soviet Union can benefit more from building popular support for themselves than by trying to bask in the illusory popularity of Russian leaders. If they focus on what they can do for their own people, they will be more respected in their own countries. And by the Kremlin as well.

#17

**The Mysterious Tale of a Ukrainian University's Anti-Semitic Crusade
Featuring the KKK 's David Duke, former KGB operatives, Palestinians and many more
By Nadine Epstein
Moment Magazine, November/December 2009**

In 2004, I read that a Ukrainian university was orchestrating an international "anti-Zionist" campaign and had invited former Klu Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke to teach. Some of Ukraine's most powerful leaders, including current president Viktor Yushchenko, were closely associated with the school, the country's largest accredited private educational institution. Last year, as this crusade was drawing to an end, I flew to Kiev in the hopes of learning why a modern-day university would choose to promote anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda. I met with Ukrainian journalists, Jewish leaders, experts in anti-Semitism and students, eventually paying a visit to the strangely named Mizhrehional'na Akademiia Upravlinnia Personalom—the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, known by its Ukrainian acronym, MAUP.

MAUP is not in downtown Kiev, with its gloriously ornate pre-war architecture and post-independence hip-urban vibe, but in a sprawling neighborhood congested with cars and the detritus of ongoing construction. Its main campus is a kitschy mix of Soviet high-rise architecture and contemporary cheap structures enlivened with rows of busts and bright colorful flags. Statues scattered throughout the grounds memorialize weapon-brandishing heroes from Ukraine's past. I don't recognize most of them, but can identify Sviatoslav, the Duke

of Kiev: He's celebrated for his defeat in 968 of the Khazars, a Turkic-speaking people who had converted en masse to Judaism. I'm also intrigued by numerous oddly shaped replicas of archeological artifacts that pay tribute to the ancient Tripoli people, symbols of "pure" Ukrainian culture to the country's extreme right-wing.

These and other monuments reflect the growing national pantheon of heroes that an independent Ukraine is excavating from history to replace the Soviet narrative imposed between 1918 and independence in 1991. The parliamentary democracy has struggled to develop a state-affirming history necessary to build unity and loyalty, and in 2002, MAUP, stepped in and positioned itself as a torchbearer of Ukrainian nationalism.

The school, which boasts over 45,000 students from 32 countries at 26 regional branches, launched a self-described campaign against Zionism, which unleashed anew the floodgates of anti-Semitism. Although it has largely wound down, coming to an "official" close at the end of 2007, the country is still recovering from the damage it inflicted. Mystery continues to surround MAUP's efforts, which drew anti-Semites from around the world. Among them was former Grand Wizard Duke, on whom it bestowed an honorary doctorate in 2002, when it published his book, *The Jewish Question through the Eyes of an American: My Investigation of Zionism*. Three years later, 12 MAUP professors unanimously lauded his dissertation, "Zionism as a form of Ethnic Supremacism," and awarded him a Ph.D. In it, he labels the civil rights movement, feminism, Marxism, Communism and the Holocaust as "Jewish conspiracies" that led the white world to lose its empire and face "a demographic and genetic catastrophe."

Duke's book was among several hundred a year espousing anti-Semitism published by the university's press and widely distributed on campuses, and in bookstores and kiosks throughout the country. "Classics" included a commemorative edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and former Syrian Defense Minister Mustapha Tlass' 1983 blood libel tome, *The Matzoh of Zion*. Most of the books were written by Ukrainian authors such as Vasily Yaramenko, who claims that "400,000 Jewish SS" invaded Ukraine and were responsible for the 1941 massacre of 33,731 Jews at Babi Yar, a ravine outside Kiev. Another prolific author was the founder and president of MAUP, Georgy Shchokin, 55, who, in a 2005 book, wrote that Mussolini, Franco and Hitler were Jewish and concluded that Jews were responsible for the "deaths of several tens of millions."

MAUP's glossy monthly magazine, *Personnel*, and its newspaper, *Personnel Plus*, ran several anti-Semitic articles in each volume. "According to our research, MAUP has published 85 to 90 percent of all anti-Semitic publications in Ukraine today," says Vyacheslav Likhachov, a well-respected expert on anti-Semitism who is based in Kiev and monitors how minorities are treated in Ukraine for the European Jewish Conference and Ukraine's Congress of Ethnic Minorities.

Many of these texts focused on Jewish history in Ukraine. "The question of whom to blame for evils against Ukrainians is something MAUP has specialized in," says Per Anders Rudling, who teaches in the history and classics department of the University of Alberta and researches Ukrainian nationalism and anti-Semitism. Ukraine's extreme right-wing, he explains, consistently portrays Ukrainians as victims of Jews. "From the perspective of anti-Semites, Jewish domination of Ukraine began in the Middle Ages and has lasted until today."

MAUP is a significant institution in Ukraine. Among its graduates are chairmen of state committees, deputy ministers, mayors, diplomats, leading members of the president's administration, heads of universities and military commanders. Some of the country's highest-ranking leaders have served on its governing board or as fellows in its think tank. In addition to Yushchenko—the hero of the 2004 Orange Revolution, who was poisoned and disfigured by dioxin and came to power after massive election fraud by his rival, former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich—other members of Ukraine's political elite are alleged to have been on the school's payroll. These include Leonid Kravchuk, the former leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party and the first president of independent Ukraine; former Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk; and Levko Lukyanenko, the first Ukrainian ambassador to Canada and a former member of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's parliamentary bloc. "MAUP is very well connected to the government," remarks Rudling.

MAUP's story and curious name originated in the final days of the Soviet Union and revolves around Georgy Shchokin. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Shchokin was a ranking member of Ukraine's Communist Party who likely had strong ties to the KGB, says Likhachov. "Somehow at the end of the USSR, Shchokin

became head of a very strange institution for people who wanted to be Soviet managers for personnel,” Likhachov says. “If you wanted to go on holiday in Bulgaria you had to go to the manager of your personnel department, who would write you a paper. Whether you could go or not was determined by your loyalty and if you were a Communist Party member.” Most personnel managers were undistinguished KGB employees.

In 1989, as Communist control waned, Shchokin followed in the footsteps of others in the ranks of power: He built a commercial institution on top of a Soviet one. Armed with good contacts and some suspect leftover Communist funds, Shchokin transformed the vocational program into a popular institution of higher learning. To pump up the school’s prestige, he lured top professors and political leaders with high salaries, funded, in part, by hefty tuitions.

Shchokin, a professor of theology who was not known to have published anything about Zionism or Jews, attended the United Nations’ 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. Created ostensibly to study these problems, the conference became an Israel bash-fest at which Shchokin gave a paper calling Zionism the enemy of humankind.

In 2002, he and his deputy, Ukrainian television personality and Personnel editor Igor Slissarenko, began to convene conferences to which they invited international figures such as Duke and Andrezj Lepper, Poland’s former agricultural minister, and various Ukrainian politicians and scholars. Shchokin also attended a conference in the United Arab Emirates, says Rudling, where he claimed that Osama bin Laden is a Jew named Benya Landau.

Over time, the campaign heated up. In April 2005, Personnel Plus published an open letter calling for a parliamentary investigation into “criminal activities” of organized Jewry in Ukraine. That October, Shchokin issued a statement of solidarity with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s threat to wipe out Israel stating, “We’d like to remind [sic] that the Living God Jesus Christ said to Jews 2,000 years ago: ‘Your father is a devil.’”

By 2006, MAUP’s influence was at its peak. It was publishing an estimated 500 pieces of anti-Semitic literature a year and made a bid to directly enter Ukrainian politics, which are generally characterized as “notoriously murky.” MAUP co-founded the Ukrainian Conservative Party, coining the slogan “Ukraine for Ukrainians Only.” Its platform demands that 80 percent of positions of power be held by ethnic Ukrainians and that only ethnic Ukrainians can become head-of-state. It also calls for the reintroduction into Ukrainian passports of the Soviet-era “nationality” clause so that Jews can be readily identified.

Ukraine’s Jewish community was alarmed. Jewish journalists spoke out against MAUP, as did leaders of synagogues and various Jewish groups. MAUP responded by taking them to court. Jed Sunden, a Brooklyn-born Jew who started the English language Kyiv Post in 1995, wrote an editorial decrying MAUP’s campaign and was sued for defamation, as was media magnate and Ukrainian Jewish leader Vadim Rabinovitch. Both lost in court and were forced to make payments and issue public apologies. “MAUP was very aggressive,” says Sunden, “and in a court system that is not incorruptible, they showed a great ability to win.”

International organizations and the Israeli and U.S. governments stepped up pressure on Ukrainian officials to publicly denounce the campaign and clamp down on the school. Mark Levin, the executive director of the Washington-based NCSJ (formally the National Council on Soviet Jewry) that monitors anti-Semitism in the former republics, met with Ukrainian political leaders and testified before the U.S. Congress. “We kept pushing the Ukrainian government to realize that MAUP was a serious problem, in terms of the message it was articulating both inside and outside Ukraine,” he says.

In 2005, three years after the campaign began, Yushchenko resigned from MAUP, urging it to respect citizens of all nationalities and to “stop rousing national hatred.” The Ministry of Education and Science publicly condemned MAUP’s activities and called for anti-incitement and state-licensing laws to be effectively enforced. Says Levin: “They started looking at the part of MAUP that was a diploma mill.”

Yushchenko and his government had incentive to respond to the pressure: the prospect of lifting the American Jackson-Vanik amendment. Under Title IV of the 1974 Trade Act, the amendment denied most-favored-nation

trading status to countries with non-market economies that restricted emigration. Ukraine was anxious to be removed from the list, which it regarded as a Cold War relic. On March 23, 2006, Ukraine was exempted from Jackson-Vanik with support from the American Jewish community. In return, the Ukrainian government promised to keep up the pressure on MAUP.

Still, many in the international community were uncomfortable with how long it took Yushchenko, and especially Foreign Minister Tarasyuk, to disassociate themselves from the school. "It took considerable international attention to make Yushchenko and Tarasyuk distance themselves from MAUP," says Rudling, adding that it is not known what sort of money Yushchenko, Kravchuk, Tarasyuk and others received "for their associations with Shchokin's network." Jed Sunden agrees that the response was slow. "I don't think a lot of the officials even knew about the campaign," he explains. "In the States it would have been very rapid, but public pressure and freedom of the press are new in this country."

By the end of 2006, MAUP no longer appeared infallible. When Shchokin and other MAUP professors ran on the Conservative Party platform in parliamentary elections, they garnered less than one percent of the vote, failing to win any seats. MAUP also began to lose its luster in court. Mikhail Frenkel, the editor of the newspaper *The Jewish Observer* and chair of the Association of Jewish Mass Media in Ukraine, was sued for defamation for a September 2005 editorial he wrote after a yeshiva student was attacked outside Kiev's central synagogue, receiving brain injuries that left him in a coma. Frenkel blamed MAUP for spreading "the poison of anti-Semitism and Judeophobia" and the government for doing nothing about it. In that same suit, MAUP also named Ukraine's chief rabbi Yankel Bleich, a Karlin-Stolin Hasid from Brooklyn, and Sergey Maxim, then head of the Jewish Federation of Ukraine. "The case went all the way to the Supreme Court," says Frenkel proudly. "Ours was the first case MAUP lost."

Ukraine and Russia are the only two former Soviet republics that still have substantial Jewish populations. I hear estimates ranging from 100,000 to 400,000, a small fraction of the country's 46 million people.

Josef Zissels, chairman of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities in Ukraine, explains why it is difficult to count Jews in Ukraine. The last census, he says, recorded 105,000 self-identified Jews but that number doesn't include all of those with Jewish mothers, which would bring the count to 200,000. "If only one parent is Jewish, a person usually says he is not Jewish—this is inertia from Soviet times," he says. "The number of Jews increases to 400,000 if you apply the criteria of Israel's Law of Return."

These numbers are minuscule compared with the nearly two million Jews who lived in Ukraine during the 19th century. "A great chapter of Jewish life occurred here," Jed Sunden reminds me. "The Hasidic movement was born and thrived in Galicia, now western Ukraine and southeast Poland. There were great yeshivas, and great secular literature came out of the community."

The tumultuous history of Jews in Galicia began in the 10th century when Polish nobles invited Jews to manage their business interests, placing the newcomers in direct conflict with the peasants who worked the land. As Polish control weakened in the 17th century and Russia expanded, Cossack troops marauded throughout central and western Ukraine, slaughtering Jews and destroying their communities.

Under Russian control, Jews were confined to the Pale of Settlement, which included much of Ukraine, and from 1922 on were citizens of the Soviet Union, where being Jewish was a stigma permanently marked in official passports and meant fewer opportunities. During the German occupation, Jews were deported to death camps or shot en masse, as in Babi Yar, not only by Nazis but by their Ukrainian neighbors. The Soviets prevented Jewish survivors from leaving the country and punished those who applied for exit visas. Later when emigration laws loosened as a result of international pressure and perestroika, nearly half a million Jews left for Israel and the West.

For those who remained behind, independence brought new challenges. For the first 13 years, the Ukrainian government remained dominated by former Soviet politicians. This came to an end in 2004 with the hotly contested election between the western-leaning Yushchenko and the heavy-handed Russian-backed Yanukovich. The Jewish community was split between the two candidates, often along generational lines. During the Orange Revolution, many young Jews openly demonstrated in support of Yushchenko.

Veins of anti-Semitism still run deep as they do elsewhere in Europe. The eastern half of Ukraine has a legacy of Soviet style anti-Zionism and the west, including Galicia, a more traditional, religious-based anti-Semitism. A 2007 paper by Volodymyr Paniotto, director of the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, found that anti-Semitism increased between 1994 and 2006. In 1994, 38 percent of Ukrainians were ready to include Jews as friends and family members, but by 2006, this had dropped to 21 percent. Paniotto found that the highest levels of anti-Semitism were among people under 20 and over 70, with 45.5 and 42.3 percent respectively unwilling to accept Jews as Ukrainian citizens.

Each year since independence, a handful of anti-Semitic incidents has rocked the Jewish community. There have been attacks against conspicuously religious Jews and occurrences of vandalism and desecration, including the 2006 defacing of the inscription on the Babi Yar memorial.

But Jed Sunden warns me not to confuse MAUP and the far right-wing with the Ukrainian people or the government. "At the end of the day there's a Jewish community here that is thriving. Modern Ukraine has a phenomenal record." Since 1991, Ukraine has normalized relations with Israel, including two-way immigration, trade and tourism. Ukrainian synagogues, schools and organizations have been established with funds from the West. Some buildings have been reclaimed and renovated, and restaurants and stores catering to Jews have opened. Both Yushchenko and Tymoshenko have traveled to Israel and assured Jews that they will fight anti-Semitism.

Josef Zissels also emphasizes that an independent Ukraine has been good to its Jews. "A lot of Jews are in leading positions in spite of the fact that 80 percent of Jews left in the last 20 years," he says. "Of the 100 richest people in Ukraine, 30 are Jewish. Eight to 10 percent of the members of the Ukrainian parliament are Jewish as are the mayors of many cities, even though only .05 percent of the population is Jewish."

Most Ukrainian Jews I met are convinced that the vast majority of Ukrainians are not interested in anti-Semitism, preferring instead to become part of the West and improve their lives. They especially see progress over the past two years. While some older Jews continue to keep mum about their ethnicity, fearing that the government's policy toward Jews could shift, younger Jews are more comfortable "coming out." Says Alisa Linderman, who is from Galicia but lives in Kiev and is in her early 20s: "Jewish teenagers today are not afraid to be Jewish. If they hear something anti-Semitic, they want answers. Even when I was their age the subject was taboo. But there are old people who are still afraid. My grandparents are distant when I talk about being Jewish. I know I am Jewish because my mother remembers her grandmother lighting candles and speaking in Yiddish with her grandfather, but when she asked her parents, they told her to forget it. So my mother started traditions fresh."

Her friend Vika Dihne, 22, is a Jewish MAUP graduate working for the Israel Cultural Center at the Israeli embassy in Kiev, recruiting young Ukrainians for Birthright and programs that make it possible for them to visit Israel. "We advertise in newspapers and by word of mouth and it's getting easier." She sees much excitement about Jews and Israel. "If I asked people two or three years ago if they have Jewish roots they would say 'No, no, no.' Now they say 'Yes.' People now call the embassy and ask where they can study Hebrew, and they are not even Jewish!"

It is Dihne who takes me on a tour of MAUP. The school offers majors in nearly every subject, and she was drawn to it for its information systems management program, she explains as we walk around campus in search of her favorite student haunts. She recalls her first visit. "It was very nice," she says. "It had nice classrooms. Nice dormitory. Nice people."

Rudling says students and staff at MAUP were intimidated into signing up for the Conservative Party and those who tried to speak out against the anti-Zionist campaign were discriminated against. But Dihne says she did not encounter anti-Semitism at MAUP, either in the curriculum or among her teachers and friends, even though her time there coincided with the school's campaign. "There were no people in my group who hated Jews," says Dihne, who, like most students from Kiev, was a commuter. She was, however, taken aback by Personnel Plus, which was sent to every student. "They were writing articles about hating Jews. I had never heard of the paper before, and I was shocked."

Like me, she's curious as to why a successful educational institution like MAUP would have decided to take on a campaign of hate. When I asked various Jewish community leaders, they responded with a range of answers, all of them speculative, since paper trails are generally nonexistent in Ukraine.

Money is one theory. Mikhail Frenkel says MAUP charges \$2,000 to \$3,000 per year for tuition for its five-year undergraduate course of study, and reaps additional profits from its graduate, long distance learning and continuing education programs. The school's large international student body has an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 students from the Middle East alone. "MAUP is a rich academy and Shchokin is very rich," says Frenkel.

The general belief is that when the Palestinian Authority opened its embassy in Kiev in 2001, Russian diplomats introduced the Palestinians to MAUP, and an agreement of cooperation was signed in which MAUP received \$5 million. There is also suspicion that MAUP received funds from Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. "A lot of Arab students and Middle Eastern counties paid a lot for the tuition and propaganda," says Frenkel, adding that little can be proved. There also may have been discussions of opening an Arab cultural center at MAUP and branches of MAUP in Damascus and the West Bank.

For Shchokin, "this was business, nothing personal," adds Frenkel. Although there are ideological anti-Semites at MAUP, Frenkel doesn't believe Shchokin is one of them. "I have met him and spoken with him," he says. "His wife Rima Brodskaya's father was Jewish, and their son attended Jewish school for two years."

Many Ukrainian Jews are convinced that Russia was the real culprit behind the MAUP campaign. Zissels believes that the campaign was a way for Russia to embarrass and discredit Yushchenko, who was daring to take on the old Soviet political establishment. Leonid Finberg, the director of Jewish Studies Institute, which encourages Jewish intellectual life and publishes Jewish-themed books, believes the conspiracy against Ukraine is much bigger and includes the FSB, Russia's successor to the KGB.

"MAUP is a special political project of forces around Ukraine, Arab countries and in my opinion, Russian influence," he tells me in his office at the prestigious National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. "Russia is a big country with big influence. And Ukraine is a middle [size] country without a strong mass media. My opinion is that 90 percent of the information about the Ukrainian people in the U.S. comes from the Russian media." Anti-Semitism, he says, is "an element of contemporary Russian propaganda."

Finberg points to the history of Russian dominance over Ukraine and the recent dispute between Russia and Ukraine over the price of gas flowing through former Soviet pipelines in Ukraine. One goal of the Russians, he says, is to make it more difficult for Ukraine to be accepted into NATO, the European Union and other Western political structures.

In October 2007, MAUP's campaign appeared to end rather suddenly, stoking more speculation. Zissels sees the cessation of activities as a response to increased government pressure and changing public opinion. "It became clear to MAUP that it wasn't profitable any more because they started to lose students who didn't want to be associated with such a despicable place."

Nearly everyone else I spoke with believed that a Russia emissary had ordered a stop to the campaign at a meeting at MAUP in October 2007. I talked with Rabbi Yankel Bleich in his beautiful wood-paneled study at the old synagogue in Podol, a Jewish neighborhood in Kiev. He is convinced that MAUP was a pawn of Muslims, extremists or Russian nationalists. "The main thing is that it was not indigenous," he insists. "The meeting shows us that the FSB was involved and that there was an order to stop." If there was an order, Ukraine's Jewish community still doesn't understand who and what was behind it. "To an extent that is more frightening. It shows us that there is someone who can turn anti-Semitism on and turn it off."

MAUP's campaign would not have been possible without what Per Rudling calls a deep-seated social acceptance of anti-Semitism in Ukraine. In September, he attended a conference during which a leader of a government agency, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, who is also a former deputy prime minister, equated Holocaust victims with perpetrators. "He stood up and said, 'The Jewish scum were no different from Ukrainian collaborators.'" Rudling was shocked not just by the comment but by the lack of reaction on the part

of Ukrainians in the audience. "In the West, there is an awareness that doesn't exist in Ukraine. There, everyone just sits and listens as if this kind of talk were normal."

Ukrainians have a tendency to conveniently mention the Jewish ancestry of others. Several times while in Ukraine, I heard innuendo that Prime Minister Tymoshenko was one-quarter or one-eighth Jewish on her mother's side, although she denies it. "This is gossip used by people who don't like her," says Frenkel. More recently, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, a former parliament speaker and potential presidential candidate, has been accused of having Jewish roots. He also denies it, despite the fact that being Jewish today is no longer a political liability. "There's a lot of anti-Semitic talk in Ukraine," says Zissels, "but it doesn't affect the composition of the parliament. You have to understand that we have a large degree of freedom of the press but there is no concept of political correctness in our society."

Mikhail Frenkel is less sanguine. Ukraine, he warns, has entered yet another period of instability. The country was hit hard by the economic recession and corruption is rampant: On a scale of corruption, Ukraine is a low-ranked 134th out of 180 nations surveyed by Berlin-based Transparency International. In addition, presidential elections are scheduled for 2010. All this worries Frenkel. "Anti-Semitism always increases in periods of instability," he says.

MAUP is no longer considered to represent the threat it did to Jews between 2002 and 2007. But the next president will face the same threat from the right, be it from MAUP or another group and will have to remain vigilant about anti-Semitism. "The challenge will be to encourage the government to be proactive," says NCSJ's Mark Levin. "Government officials need to speak out, to utilize the laws that exist to deal with hate crimes, to create new laws, to expand teaching of tolerance in the educational system and get the right messages across to the broader public," he says. "Some of this is being done but there's far more to do."

There's an epilogue to this story. Since 2008, Personnel and Personnel Plus have, for the most part, lost interest in Jews. Past anti-Semitic writings from the periodicals, however, remain on the MAUP website. In addition, the Ukrainian Conservative Party website is no longer directly linked to the MAUP website. The party's site has not been updated since 2008.

MAUP continues to publish 50 percent of all hate literature in Ukraine, according to Zissels. He estimates that MAUP's anti-Semitic titles have dwindled to about 25 a year, and expects the downward spiral to continue.

Although MAUP's anti-Semitic presses are winding down, their merchandise remains readily available. On a September shopping expedition to MAUP's main campus bookstore, Per Rudling found at least 70 anti-Semitic books for sale and spotted a display rack featuring *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Meanwhile, David Duke has been banned from Ukraine since 2006. The former MAUP student's latest anti-Semitic rants can be found on "The Official Website of Representative David Duke, PhD." He lives in a village near Salzberg, Austria, where he runs a small business photographing birds.

Nadine Epstein is Moment's editor and publisher.