



NCSJ WEEKLY EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS
Washington, D.C. Friday, February 26, 2010

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2. *NCSJ Attends Panel Discussion on Ukrainian Democracy*
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3. *NCSJ Meets with Latvian Delegation*
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1a. NCSJ Attends U.S.-Ukraine Foundation Briefing on Election

NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin attended a briefing with featured speaker Oleh Rybachuk, former Chief of Staff for former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko. Mr. Rybachuk discussed the results of the Ukrainian election.

1b. NCSJ Attends U.S.-Russia Business Council Capitol Hill Reception for Russian Duma Members

NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin attended a reception sponsored by the U.S.-Russia Business Council for a visiting delegation of Russian parliamentarians. Several Members of Congress were in attendance, including House Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairman Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA) and Rep. William Delahunt (D-MA), the new Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe.

1c. NCSJ Meets with Moldovan Chargé D’Affaires

NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin met with Moldovan Chargé d’affaires Andrei Galbur at the Moldovan Embassy. Topics of conversation included current U.S. – Moldovan relations, Moldova’s graduation from Jackson-Vanik, and an anti-Semitic slur made by Moldovan acting President Mihai Ghimpu. NCSJ raised their objections on this issue, and received an apology from the Embassy.

1d. NCSJ Attends Estonia Reception

NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin attended a reception at the Embassy of Estonia to celebrate Estonian Independence Day.

1e. NCSJ Teleconferences with Kyiv Hillel

NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs Lesley Weiss teleconferenced with the Kyiv Hillel to discuss and outline the upcoming NCSJ Student Leadership trip, which will bring students from Stanford University to Kyiv.

2. NCSJ Attends Panel Discussion on Ukrainian Democracy

NCSJ Senior Program Associate David Shulman attended a discussion on Ukraine. The George Washington University Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), in conjunction with the Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia (PONARS Eurasia) held a panel discussion entitled, "Beyond the Orange Revolution: Does Ukraine's Democracy Matter?" The panel participants were Olexiy Haran, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy; Oleksandr Sushko, Center for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine and Alexander Cooley, Barnard College, Columbia University.

The panelists addressed whether Ukraine has become a sustainable if imperfect democracy, the implications for its relations with Europe and Russia, and whether the Orange Revolution represents a model or threat to other states and regimes in the post-Soviet space.

The panelists agreed that the election was genuinely competitive and democratic. Sushko expressed some doubts about Ukraine's overall capacity for democracy. He sees some strong civil society institutions but some negative democratic trends, including corruption in the media. Haran acknowledged that Ukraine's political parties, unlike those in Western Europe and the United States, aren't ultimately self-sustaining because they're based around central personalities, not core ideologies. Cooley, however, said that Ukraine has had the only successful color revolution, as measured by democratic outcomes.

In addition to the election, the panelists discussed other color revolutions (i.e. Georgia and Kyrgyzstan), the global economic downturn's effect on Ukraine's politics, and the political implications of the Russian naval presence in the Crimea.

3. NCSJ Meets with Latvian Delegation

On Monday, NCSJ hosted a meeting with a Latvian delegation visiting Washington. The Latvian delegation announced the Riga municipality's plan to provide a school to the Jewish community. Mr. Ainars Slesers, Vice-Mayor of Riga, said the proposal is a positive alternative to the Jewish community's current plans for a school. The Jewish community has been deliberating over 2 properties, but Mr. Slesers believes the buildings are under-developed. The Vice-Mayor said they are ready to offer another location for the school and are ready to invest over \$1 million on renovating the building, which is located in downtown Riga. The school will belong to the municipality, but will be run by the Jewish community.

Mr. Georgs Lansmanis, Economic and Development Adviser to the Vice-Mayor, and member of Shamir (Association of Jewish Professionals from the former Soviet Union) discussed the plan for the Riga Ghetto Museum. The Riga ghetto is unique because the ghetto was not destroyed at the end of World War II, and the museum will be the first of its kind in Eastern and Central Europe. Mr. Lansmanis is hopeful work will begin on the project this summer. He said the museum will also serve as a tolerance center. The museum will be located about 200 meters away from the ghetto. Mr. Lansmanis also mentioned plans for a March of Peace and a conference to be held on July 4th, Latvia's Holocaust Memorial Day, and plans for renovating Jewish cemeteries in Latvia.

In response to questions about restitution, Andrejs Pildegovics, Ambassador of Latvia to the United States, said that more than 60 properties have been given back to the community. Of the remaining 12 to 15 properties in question, he described the main issue as being that some of the buildings or the organizations they belonged to do not exist anymore. In some instances it is unclear who should be compensated. The delegation was adamant that after Latvia regained its independence, anyone who could prove a property was theirs had the property returned to them.

Ambassador Pildegovics also mentioned the unveiling of a new monument in August or September to memorialize Janis Lipke, who saved the lives of 40 Jews (1/5th of an estimated total of 200 Jews who survived the Holocaust in Latvia) and was named Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1966.

Other issues discussed included building closer economic ties between Latvia and the U.S., looking for areas of mutual interest, Latvia's current economic situation, its strategy and goals moving forward, and the upcoming parliamentary election in October.

4. NCSJ Attends Discussion on “Putin's Russia”

NCSJ Senior Program Associate David Shulman attended a discussion on Russia. Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) hosted a discussion titled "Dealing with Putin's Russia." The speaker was Daniel Fried, former assistant secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia and former U.S. Ambassador to Poland. Amb. Fried's prepared remarks were on-the-record, but answers to questions from the audience were not.

Amb. Fried talked about Russian post-Soviet history and U.S.-Russia relations. He described two separate “narratives” for Russia over the past 18 years – the U.S. perception of Russia, and Russia's self-perception – and a consequent perception gap.

The United States narrative saw post-Soviet Russia as democratizing and market-reforming, and a potential global partner in NATO, WTO, OECD and the G8. Russia saw the post-Soviet 1990's as a “lost decade,” of retreat, chaos, Western bullying and opportunism. The U.S. has seen Putin's reign as dismantling 1990's progress, but Russians see him strengthening the state, taming oligarchs and promoting Russia's privileged sphere of influence in its “near abroad.”

Sec. Clinton's “reset” of U.S.-Russia relations in March 2009 is the best chance for progress in U.S.-Russia relations on issues of mutual concern, like counterterrorism. The U.S. must remain realistic in trying to move relations forward, and must also exercise patient hopefulness. The possibility for better governance and democratic reforms in Russia still exists.

During the question period, Amb. Fried discussed coordinating U.S. policy with Western Europe, particularly Germany; prospects for NATO enlargement; the conflict in Georgia; the state of the “reset”; and how Russia responds to perceived internal and external threats.

5. NCSJ Attends Discussion on Georgian Security

NCSJ Senior Program Associate David Shulman attended a discussion on Georgian security and the U.S.-Georgia bilateral relationship. The discussion, entitled “The U.S.-Georgia Partnership: Opportunities and Challenges” was held by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University. The featured speaker was Ekaterine Tkeshelashvili, Secretary of the National Security Council, Republic of Georgia, and former Minister of Justice and of Foreign Affairs.

Sec. Tkeshelashvili began with an overview of Georgia, which has strategic energy significance as an east-to-west conduit, and because of its proximity to the Caspian Sea littoral nations. After the 2003 Rose Revolution, she said, Georgia embarked on a path of greater democratic reform and Euro-Atlantic integration. In January 2009, the United States and Georgia signed a Charter of Strategic Partnership.

Georgia's greatest security challenge is the occupation of 20% of the country by Russian forces, she said, referring to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. Georgia's options are limited in these regions, so it is focusing on development in the rest of the country. Initiatives include anti-corruption efforts, infrastructure projects, a new special economic zone and public broadcasting, as well as securing a favorable trade agreement with the European Union. Georgia is working to align its military capabilities to match NATO standards, as well as the threat it faces from Russia.

Tkeshelashvili encouraged more active U.S. engagement in the Georgia and the wider Caucasus and Eurasia regions.

During the question period, Tkeshelashvili discussed France's talks to sell its Mistral naval assault vessel to Russia, and the state of Georgia's military capabilities, including cyber defenses and a nationwide strategic assessment. She discussed Georgia's attempt to remain positively engaged with the occupied regions, and problems stemming from the conflict with Russia, including displaced persons and property theft.