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Johnson's Russia List
2014-#29
11 February 2014
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"We don't see things as they are, but as we are"

"Don't believe everything you think"

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#1

Russian academics protest Kennan closure

Interfax

February 11, 2014

The Russian academic community reacted with shock and alarm to the recent decision by the Washington, D.C.-based Woodrow Wilson Center to shut down the Moscow office of the Kennan Institute. The oldest of the Wilson Center's programs, the Kennan Institute brings together "scholars and governmental specialists to discuss political, social, and economic issues affecting Russia," according to the organization's website.

In an open letter, published on Feb. 10 at Russia Direct, Russian scholars called the decision "inappropriate, ill-timed, and extremely harmful to the long term prospects of U.S.-Russian relations."

According to the letter, budget cuts were the reason behind the move.

"We understand that financial constraints are a serious issue. And we understand that funding for Russian studies in general and the Kennan Institute in particular is limited. But we also believe that the importance of maintaining Kennan Institute alumni activities in Russia is greatly underestimated in Washington," reads the letter.

Moscow-based alumni of Kennan programs have asked that the decision to close the Institute's Moscow office be reviewed and they are now working to collect names for a petition to protest the shut down.

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#2

Russia Direct

February 10, 2014

Kennan Institute alumni in Russia: An open letter

The Wilson Center's decision to halt the activities of the Kennan Institute's Moscow office will have profoundly negative implications for U.S.-Russia relations.

By The Kennan Institute's alumni in Russia

The Russian academic community learned with shock and anxiety of the Wilson Center's recent decision to shut down the Kennan Institute's Moscow office. The decision seems to us inappropriate, ill-timed, and extremely harmful to the long term prospects of U.S.-Russian relations.

Budget savings from closing the office are no doubt a priority in Washington. We understand this. But the modest, short-term gains seem small in comparison to the long-term loss. The functional base of the leading social network for academic cooperation between Russia and the United States will disappear overnight. With it will go a heritage of improving understanding between the people of both countries that extends back over a quarter-century.

The Moscow Kennan office has likely been the single most efficient venue for cooperation between Russian humanities and social science scholars and public figures. This fits the Wilson Center's longstanding mission of "bringing Athens to Sparta."

Its journal, the "Vestnik Instituta Kennana," has earned a reputation as the best print medium for promoting interdisciplinary networking among Russian scholars and for building bridges to policy-makers.

Taken together, the Kennan alumni represent probably the most influential community of public intellectuals and academics in Russia with the authority to improve Russian-American relations despite propaganda efforts and diplomatic tensions.

We will certainly continue our work here with or without the Center's support. But with the loss of the free atmosphere of the Kennan office, its organizing capacity and the events the office has helped to coordinate, it is hard to imagine the same level of engagement.

What makes the situation especially discouraging and ironic is that the Moscow Kennan office survived the Russian government's wave of attacks against foreign-funded NGOs in early 2013, only to be closed instead by Washington.

Such a step cannot be seen in Russia outside the context of the general freeze in Russian-American relations. Nor, indeed, can it be seen in any other light than as first, a concession by the American funders to the unlawful demands of certain Russian enemies of US-Russian friendship, and second, as a betrayal of those who worked hardest here to make the connections between our societies better.

We consider it a genuine tragedy that the Kennan Institute will be contributing to the deterioration of US-Russian relations, especially when its historic record demonstrates a will and a capacity to maintain the deeper ties of U.S.-Russian cooperation whatever the short-term political setbacks and fluctuations.

The only semi-parallel U.S. organizations that will remain here after the closing of the Kennan Moscow office are the Carnegie Moscow Center and the Institute of International Education - both of which have very different missions and neither of which has ever enjoyed a Kennan-like level of engagement on the part of Russian scholars.

It is impossible to imagine another American research institution or agency being allowed to open a branch in Russia today.

Therefore in practical terms, the Kennan Institute and the Wilson Center will never, once the Kennan office is closed, be able to restore the unique presence and positive influence they enjoy in Russia today.

We understand that financial constraints are a serious issue. And we understand that funding for Russian studies in general and the Kennan Institute in particular is limited. But we also believe that the importance of maintaining Kennan Institute alumni activities in Russia is greatly underestimated in Washington.

Finding the funds for those activities is in the best interests of both the Russian and American people, as we both seek to increase, not decrease, the level and quality of non-governmental dialogue.

The Kennan alumni in Russia ask that the decision to close the Institute's Moscow office be reviewed - and add their hope that they will be able to join in the search for ways to sustain the operations of this vital center.

On behalf of the Kennan Institute Alumni in Russia - Victoria Zhuravleva, Ivan Kurilla, Emil Pain, Boris Lanin, Olga Malinova, Olga Volkogonova, Anna Sevortian, Leonid Gozman, William Smirnov, Alexander Okun, Julia Khmelevskaya, Alexander Kubyshkin.

February 7, 2014

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#3

Moscow Times

February 11, 2014

Sochi Security Gets High Marks

By Yekaterina Kravtsova, Ivan Nechepurenko

SOCHI - Security concerns over terrorist attacks have declined since the Sochi Winter Olympics kicked off over the weekend, and visitors say they have not been inconvenienced by security measures despite the presence of thousands of law enforcement officers.

The issue of security dominated international headlines in the run-up to the Games, and the U.S. offered assistance from its own security services, citing the threat of attacks by Islamist militants from the turbulent North Caucasus region that borders Sochi as reason to be extra vigilant.

The U.S. officials attending the Games said they were satisfied with the security provided by Russian authorities, however.

"The level of security is quite appropriate and it is very good and I hope the attention of the media and the world turns now more to what the athletes are going to do instead of the threats that are being made," Janet Napolitano, the head of the U.S. delegation and former homeland security secretary, told CNN on Sunday.

Tourists seemed equally pleased, saying the expectations that had been built up by Western media were false.

"I have been to London and Vancouver and the way everything is organized here is way better," said Tyler Post from Sacramento, California.

"Our media in the U.S. is a mess, what I see here is very different from the picture they have

portrayed," he said.

Another U.S. tourist echoed that sentiment, saying the U.S. media had "made it look as though the police would be very pervasive."

"The media in the U.S. has obviously blown [the security issue] out of proportion," said Branton Terry from Oklahoma.

Even if not an eyesore for tourists, however, security was still clearly present at the Games. Little white tents were scattered around the alpine roads in the mountains, with police personnel monitoring the situation from the inside.

Security personnel were dressed in outfits that were indistinguishable from the volunteers' uniforms, a fact which perhaps ensured that visitors would not feel too nervous.

Despite earlier reports of U.S. officials complaining about cooperation with Russian security services, U.S. Ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul said in an interview with NBC on Sunday that the U.S. had coordinated "very closely" with the Russians in sharing information on possible threats.

"We are quite satisfied with the level of cooperation we have now," McFaul said.

On the eve of the opening ceremony on Friday, International Olympic Committee head Thomas Bach told reporters in Sochi he was sure the games would be completely secure and laughed off a remark about these games being the first facing a direct threat.

"I am really sorry but you cannot forget how many threats there were at each of the Olympic Games before," he said. "We had threats on Sydney, we had threats on Athens. Maybe you remember the situation in Salt Lake City. There were many so you cannot single out these Games in this way."

Sochi police were unable to comment immediately on whether there were new threats in Sochi since the beginning of the Olympics, but no additional security measures were visible in the city during the first days of the Games.

Crowds of people had to wait to pass a security check only at one venue in central Sochi where spectators gathered to watch a live broadcast of the events.

On trains that run from Sochi to Krasnaya Polyana and other Olympic venues, security remained the same as it was before the Olympics. All the bags were scanned but security officers operated quickly and there were usually no lines at the security checkpoints.

The train station in Sochi was the only place where spectators heading to the Olympic Park or alpine venues had to pass a security check.

The number of police officers on Sochi streets remained the same as it was on the eve of the Olympics. Police officers on 24-hour patrol could be seen every few hundred meters in central Sochi. Russian authorities had said earlier that some 40,000 police officers would be present in the city during the Games.

Another Olympic visitor from the U.S., Barbara Ganong, said that her visit to Sochi had proven earlier media reports wrong.

"They did a good job, security is not excessive and it definitely makes me feel safe," she said, standing in front of the entrance to the Krasnaya Polyana railway station.

Yet while media reports of terrorist threats and construction blunders were drowned out by feel-

good stories about athletes taking gold during the first few days of the Games, there was one sobering reminder on Monday about Russia's ongoing battle against an insurgency in the neighboring North Caucasus.

Police killed five suspected militants and took one into custody in a raid on a house in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, located some 600 kilometers from Sochi.

Some observers and U.S. authorities had earlier warned that terrorist attacks during the Games were more likely in regions beyond Sochi, particularly in Dagestan.

Kommersant reported Monday that the alleged militants were part of an extremist group that had organized the twin bombings in Volgograd in December that killed 34 people. According to the report, one of the militants, Alexei Pashentsev, was an ethnic Russian who had recently converted to Islam.

The report also said police believed the group had moved to Makhachkala recently because they may have been planning a terrorist attack there while the Olympics were going on in Sochi.

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#4

Awesome Soviet era symbol keeps Russian society split in two
By Lyudmila Alexandrova

MOSCOW, February 11. /ITAR-TASS/. Lenin called that man, son of an impoverished Polish noble, "a proletarian Jacobean", and put him in charge of fighting counter-revolution. Felix Dzerzhinsky was appointed first head of the All-Russia Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-revolution and Sabotage, reorganized into the State Political Directorate - a section of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs - the then Soviet equivalent of the Interior Ministry) in 1922. Described by his Bolshevik comrades as the "Iron Felix", he initiated massive terror and repressions, hostage-taking and other methods to "defend the Revolution".

After an abortive coup against the USSR's first and last president, Mikhail Gorbachev, in August 1991, the first thing jubilant Muscovites did was to remove the monument to Dzerzhinsky off the plinth. This work of famous sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich, had been in the centre of the square, called after the first KGB chief, in front of the secret service headquarters for decades. A year earlier, months before the breakup of the Soviet Union, a huge stone from the Solovki islands, used in the first Soviet years as a prison for political opponents, had been placed near the Polytechnic Museum. The square itself was renamed to Lubyanka Square.

This gesture, commemorating all victims of political repression, was then perceived as the final farewell to the darkest pages of the Soviet past. Yet now some are eager to bring the monument back to the square again. The issue lists among the twelve questions the Communist Party's Moscow branch referred to the Moscow election commission requesting a citywide referendum. The commission will rule on the feasibility of resolving such issues via a referendum on February 20.

There has also been a personal initiative of a group of individuals, lodged with the Moscow Duma's commission on monumental art, for renovating the monument and returning it to its original place from Muzeon Park, where Dzerzhinsky's statue can be seen alongside other Soviet era monuments. Interestingly, this is an eighth appeal for the Iron Felix statue's return since 2001. This is rather unlikely to happen, though, since it also requires the government's approval. The statue is a monument of federal importance. But the issue has already provoked heated discussions in the society.

In the meantime, a large-scale program is now on across the country for erecting monuments to

some heroes of World War I. The upcoming ones are monuments to Admiral Alexander Kolchak, generals Nikolai Denisov and Anton Denikin, later leaders of the White Guard movement, the Bolshevik's arch foes.

One can only wonder at how Russians are still concerned about the events of almost one hundred years ago - the Revolution and the Civil War. The war between the Reds and the Whites seems to be going on - in many people's minds. Although eliminating monuments of any epoch, however cruel it may have been, is by no means the best possible way to assert justice, some symbolical personalities in Soviet history invariably split the people in two implacable camps. The personalities on top of that list are Lenin, Stalin and Dzerzhinsky.

Each time someone says Lenin's embalmed body now lying inside the Mausoleum in Red Square should be buried, the Communists and their allies stand up in Lenin's defense, whereas the authorities evade the issue for fear of a flare-up of social tensions. Any event, which the liberal community sees as exoneration of Stalin and his policy of repression, causes uproars in the media. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that attempts to bring the monument back have caused such a tumult again. Should we be ashamed of our history, should we demolish or restore monuments?

"If the monument to the Iron Felix comes back, this place will become the scene of an open-ended rally against it, and I am determined to partake," said Russian human rights ombudsman Vladimir Lukin.

"Dzerzhinsky was simply a butcher of his own people. He executed the Red Terror policy. He has no other achievements in the eyes of our people - if it is to be considered an achievement, of course" believes the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Lyudmila Alexeyeva.

"The issue of bringing Felix Dzerzhinsky's monument back to Lubyanka square cannot be viewed from the purely artistic perspective, in terms of the city's appearance, of restoring the square's historical face and so on," a member of the human rights organization Memorial, Oleg Orlov, is quoted by the Novyie Izvestia daily as saying. "One could then indulge in similar speculations about restoring the way some Germany cities looked in the 1930s. Some may say Hitler's monument stood here once, so why not bringing it back irrespective of what we think about this personality? Such reasoning is possible, but it would be absolutely blasphemous and unacceptable."

Yet, some voice other views. The leader of A Just Russia party, former speaker of the upper house of parliament, Sergey Mironov, has spoken in favour of the monument's comeback.

"I think such issues are to be voted on by the people of Moscow in a city referendum, and if I took part in such a voting, I would vote for bringing the monument back," Mironov said. "I am concerned about the fact we have such an easy attitude towards our monuments, we should not be ashamed of our history."

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#5

Moscow commission rules not to reinstall monument to Dzerzhinsky on Lubyanskaya Square

MOSCOW. Feb 11 (Interfax) - The Moscow City Duma's monumental art commission unanimously decided on Tuesday not to return a monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, a prominent Soviet statesman and founder of the Soviet security services, to Lubyanskaya Square in central Moscow.

"Taking into account the current circumstances in society, I propose refraining from returning the monument. This is more of a political issue," Lev Lavrenov, the commission's chairman, said at the Tuesday session.

The commission has considered the return of the monument to Dzerzhinsky to Lubyanskaya

Square for the sixth time since 2000.

"We are firmly convinced that it is inappropriate to erect a monument to Dzerzhinsky on Lubyanskaya Square, as it could produce undesirable tensions in society," Lavrenov said.

A number of commission members noted that the monument to Dzerzhinsky, which used to be located on Lubyanskaya Square in Soviet times, is good artwork, and the place where it is located now, the Muzeon park, is best.

Some commission members suggested during the discussions that the monument could be returned in the future, while others objected to this in principle.

"When those who don't remember this man come several generations later, they might reinstall [the monument]. Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] and Dzerzhinsky started the repression," commission member Valery Perfilov said at the session.

Officials from the Moscow city culture department and Moscow City Architecture Committee also noted that it would be inappropriate to reinstall the monument now.

The monument to Dzerzhinsky was transferred from federal to municipal ownership in 2008 and is officially considered a cultural heritage object. Its condition has been found to be unsatisfactory, and its restoration is planned in 2014.

Two individuals known as Zilinsky and Terekhov had earlier filed petitions on reinstalling the monument on Lubyanskaya Square. The commission is supposed to consider any incoming proposals on installing monuments.

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#6

Pew Research

www.pewforum.org

February 10, 2014

Russians Return to Religion, But Not to Church

[Complete text and charts here <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/>]

Over the past two decades, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been an upsurge in affiliation with Orthodox Christianity in Russia.¹ Between 1991 and 2008, the share of Russian adults identifying as Orthodox Christian rose from 31% to 72%, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of three waves of data (1991, 1998 and 2008) from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) - a collaboration involving social scientists in about 50 countries. During the same period, the share of Russia's population that does not identify with any religion dropped from 61% to 18%. The share of Russian adults identifying with other religions, including Islam, Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism, rose in the 1990s and then leveled off. (Estimates of the size of Russia's Muslim population vary. The most recent ISSP survey finds that Muslims make up 5% of Russia's population, but other surveys and studies have somewhat higher estimates. For more information, see "Sochi Olympics shine spotlight on Russia's Muslim population.")

There also has been a modest increase in some measures of religious commitment. For example, the share of Russian adults who said they are at least "somewhat" religious rose from 11% in 1991 to 54% in 2008. And the portion of adults who said they believe in God rose from 38% to 56% over the same period.²

But for most Russians, the return to religion did not correspond with a return to church. Across all three waves of ISSP data, no more than about one-in-ten Russians said they attend religious

services at least once a month. The share of regular attenders (monthly or more often) was 2% in 1991, 9% in 1998 and 7% in 2008. This suggests that although many more Russians now freely identify with the Orthodox Church or other religious groups, they may not be much more religiously observant than they were in the recent past, at least in terms of attendance at religious services.

Russia's Changing Religious Makeup

For centuries, Orthodox Christianity was the dominant religion in Russia. This began to change in the early 20th century, following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the imposition of state-sponsored atheism as part of communist ideology. During the Soviet period, many priests were imprisoned, many churches were converted to other uses or fell into disrepair, and people who publicly professed religious beliefs were denied prestigious jobs and admission to universities. While it is likely that some share of the population continued, in private, to identify with the Orthodox Church and other religious groups, it is impossible to measure the extent to which these attachments survived underground during the Soviet period and to what extent they faded away.

Similarly, it is difficult to disentangle the extent to which the upsurge in Orthodox affiliation found in the surveys represents an expression of long-held faith or a genuinely new wave of religious affiliation. It may be that after the fall of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Russians felt freer to express the religious identities they had quietly maintained during the Soviet era.³ However, given that the share of Russians identifying with a religion rose almost as much between 1998 and 2008 as it did from 1991 to 1998, the data suggest that the change is not solely an immediate aftereffect of the collapse of the Soviet system.

According to the ISSP, six-in-ten Russian adults (61%) surveyed in 1991 identified as religiously unaffiliated, while about a third said they were Orthodox Christians (31%). Over the next 17 years, those percentages virtually flipped. By 2008, roughly seven-in-ten Russians identified as Orthodox Christians (72%), while about one-in-five were religiously unaffiliated (18%). During the same period, there also was a modest increase in the share of the Russian public identifying with religions other than Orthodox Christianity, including Islam, Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism.⁴

Growing religious affiliation in Russia is seen across a variety of demographic groups. For example, the share of Russian women identifying as Orthodox Christians increased by 38 percentage points between 1991 and 2008, while the share of women with no religious affiliation declined by 36 points. The changes among Russian men have been even more pronounced; 63% of Russian men identified as Orthodox Christians in 2008, up 46 percentage points since 1991, while the share of Russian men who espoused no religious affiliation declined by 52 points over the same period.⁵

Similarly, the ISSP surveys show increases in identification with Orthodox Christianity among both younger Russians (up 43 percentage points among Russians ages 16-49) and older Russians (up 39 points among Russians ages 50 and older). And affiliation with Orthodox Christianity has grown substantially among Russians at all education levels, especially among Russian university graduates.

The remainder of this analysis examines religious affiliation and religious beliefs and practices by demographic group in 2008, the most recent year for which ISSP data are available. In 2008, Russian women were more religious than Russian men, and Russians ages 70 and older were more religious than younger age groups on some measures.

Differences in the Religious Affiliation and Religious Commitment of Russians, by Demographic Group

Gender

Russian women were considerably more likely than men to identify as Orthodox Christians in 2008. While about eight-in-ten Russian women (81%) were Orthodox Christians, fewer Russian men (63%) said they belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, about twice as many

Russian men (24%) as women (12%) said they had no religious affiliation.

By several measures, Russian women also had higher levels of religious commitment than Russian men. For example, much larger shares of women said they believe in God (63% of women vs. 46% of men) and described themselves as at least somewhat religious (63% of women vs. 43% of men). However, Russian women were not much more likely than Russian men to say they regularly attend religious services (9% vs. 5%).

Age

Majorities of all age groups in Russia identified as Orthodox Christians in 2008. However, older Russians were more likely than those in younger age groups to say they belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. More than eight-in-ten (82%) Russians ages 70 and older identified as Orthodox Christians, compared with 62% of Russians ages 16-29.

Meanwhile, identifying with religions other than Orthodox Christianity was more common among younger Russians (13% among those ages 16-29, 7% among those ages 30-49) than among older Russians (1% among those ages 50-69, 4% among those ages 70 and older). According to the ISSP data, Muslims account for 9% of Russians ages 16-29, 6% of Russians ages 30-49, 1% of those ages 50-69 and 3% of those ages 70 and older.

With a few exceptions, religious practices and beliefs did not differ widely by age group in Russia in 2008. However, Russians ages 70 and older were more likely than younger cohorts to say they believe in God and to describe themselves as at least somewhat religious.

Education

In 2008, Russians' religious affiliation did not differ markedly by education level. About three-quarters of those with a university degree and of those with fewer years of formal education identified as Orthodox Christians, while about one-in-six in each group said they had no religious affiliation.

Religious commitment also did not vary much by education level, according to several measures, including frequency of attendance at religious services, belief in God and describing oneself as at least somewhat religious. The only measure on which education level made a significant difference was belief in life after death; Russians who have a university degree were slightly more likely than those with less education to say they believe in life after death.

Methodology

The data used in this report are from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), a consortium of researchers who conduct public surveys in about 50 countries according to international sampling standards with comparable questionnaires across countries. The ISSP includes many North American and European countries as well as a few nations in South America, Africa and Asia. The trends in this report go back to 1991, the year the USSR was formally dissolved and the ISSP conducted its first survey of religious beliefs and practices in Russia. Religion also was the focus of ISSP surveys in 1998 and 2008. This report is based on data from the ISSP Religion cumulative file.

The surveys are probability samples that are geographically stratified and are nationally representative of the Russian adult population ages 16 years and older. Data were collected by self-administered questionnaire May 15-June 6, 1991; Sept. 5-26, 1998; and Jan. 2-26, 2008.⁶ Surveys were conducted in the Russian language. All survey estimates use weights provided by ISSP staff. Sample sizes for the total adult sample and subsamples are shown in the table above. Based on sample sizes and designs of the surveys, the margin of sampling error for results based on the total sample is roughly $\pm 3.0\%$ in 1991, $\pm 3.3\%$ in 1998 and $\pm 4.4\%$ in 2008, with larger margins of error for subgroups.

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#7

Half of Russians Are in Love - Poll

MOSCOW, February 11 (RIA Novosti) - Almost half of Russians are currently in love, although men with romantic feelings outnumber women, according to a new poll released Tuesday.

Some 48 percent of Russians admitted to being in love, 4 percent less than in 2011, the survey by the independent Levada Center found.

But, implying some emotional drama, the figure for men stood at 56 percent compared to just 40 percent for women. The poll did not give a gender breakdown for respondents.

A shy 10 percent declined to say whether they were in love, up from 8 percent in 2011, when the question was first polled.

Russians have also grown notably more tolerant of public displays of affection, with 46 percent saying they felt no particular emotions when they see couples making out in public. The figure was 33 percent in 1998.

Some do get hot and bothered by public smooching: 12 percent said that they were outraged by it and 11 percent irritated, while 10 percent were happy to see people kissing in public.

The number of Russian irritated by public kissing was 19 percent in 1998, with 16 percent professing outrage.

The mix of emotions felt by Russians witnessing a kissing couple also included shame (8 percent), curiosity (6 percent), sadness (4 percent), envy (3 percent) and delight (4 percent).

The poll, held ahead of Valentine's Day on Friday, covered 1,600 respondents nationwide and had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

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#8

Moscow Times

What the Papers Say, Feb. 11

Kommersant

1. Vladimir Dzaguto et al. report headlined "Investments do not reach Caucasus" says an attempt by Presidential Representative to the North Caucasus Federal District Alexander Khloponin to attract investments to the region with the assistance of the federal centre has failed. As the federal government has ignored the initiative, experts note that Khloponin's policy in the region has not worked; pp 1, 3 (1,614 words).

2. Afsati Dzhusoyti article headlined "Naturalized bronze" reports on performance of Russian athletes at the Sochi Olympics; p 1 (281 words).

3. Andrei Kolesnikov article headlined "Fourth side of medal" reports on the victory of Russian figure skater Evgeni Plushenko at the Sochi Olympics and on his difficulties with recovering after a spine operation; pp 1, 12 (2,490 words).

4. Yegor Popov et al. report headlined "AvtoVAZ rolls back" says AvtoVAZ car sales fell by 21 percent in January 2014. Experts attribute the trend to a decreasing demand for low-cost vehicles; pp 1, 9 (675 words).

5. Maxim Ivanov article headlined "Moscow election regulations to be compared with international ones" says the Communist Party is appealing to the Constitutional Court against the new regulations for the Moscow City Duma elections that do not allow political parties to take part in the polls with their own lists of candidates. The Communists believe that United Russia has changed the regulations for its own benefit; p 2 (502 words).

6. Sergei Mashkin article headlined "Impossible to catch son-in-law" says Anatoly Puzikov, the relative of former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, has avoided arrest on fraud charges and is probably hiding abroad; p 5 (500 words).

7. Pavel Tarasenko article headlined "Geneva 2 goes to second round" says no breakthrough is expected from the second round of Syria talks in Geneva; p 6 (496 words).

Nezavisimaya Gazeta

1. Mikhail Sergeyev article headlined "Moscow hopes for reconciliation with EU" says the future of the utilization duty imposed in Belarus and thus affecting other countries of the Customs Union is still unclear. Moscow is monitoring the reaction of the European Commission to the duty; pp 1, 4 (500 words).

2. Tatyana Ivzhenko article headlined "Ukrainian radicals ready to seize mainstream gas pipelines" says the EU is undecided whether to impose sanctions against the Ukrainian authorities or to continue a dialogue with Kiev. Meanwhile, Ukrainian opposition radicals do not want to wait for the results of lengthy talks; pp 1, 6 (1,200 words).

3. Ivan Rodin article headlined "United Russia platforms collide due to material evidence" says two groups within United Russia, liberals and patriots, cannot come to agreement over the right of the law-enforcement agencies to seize large batches of goods as part of material evidence. Goods seized by the police often get lost causing entrepreneurs losses; pp 1, 3 (700 words).

4. Anastasia Bashkatova article headlined "Russians should not wait for petrol to become cheaper" says prices on petrol grew by 6 percent in Russia in 2013, while they decreased by 3 percent during the same period in Europe. No fuel price reduction is expected in Russia; pp 1, 4 (1,000 words).

5. Sokhbet Mamedov article headlined "West prepares Maidan for Baku" says the West is to support civil society in Azerbaijan ahead of the 2015 European Games; pp 1, 6 (400 words).

6. Editorial headlined "Will change in name hamper Alexei Navalny?" says Alexei Navalny's People Alliance has been renamed into the Party of Progress after another opposition party took the alliance's name. The article notes that the former name of Navalny's party was more appealing to left-wing electorate who are indifferent to progress; p 2 (400 words).

7. Oleg Nikiforov article headlined "Carte Blanche. Who is he, new German ambassador to Moscow?" looks at the career and political affiliation of German diplomat Ruediger Freiherr von Fritsch who is to become new German ambassador to Russia; p 3 (500 words).

Vedomosti

1. Yelena Khodyakova article headlined "Gazprom to occupy St. Petersburg in two years" says Gazprom is to move to St. Petersburg by the end of 2015. The gas giant is looking for new offices and personnel in the city as not everybody is going to leave Moscow to continue working for the company; pp 1, 12 (500 words).

2. Editorial headlined "Torch and smoke" says Russian officials accuse bloggers writing about theft in the preparation for the Sochi Olympics of a lack of love for their motherland. The article notes that President Vladimir Putin's control over the Olympics created high expectation among general public; pp 1, 6 (400 words).

3. Anastasia Kornya article headlined "Bolotnaya prisoners were humanely fed" says the Russian government has asked the European Court of Human Rights to turn down a complain by defendants in the case of 2012 unrest in Moscow's Bolotnaya Ploshchad. The defendants say they have been inhumanely treated in jail; p 2 (500 words).

4. Maria Zheleznova et al. report headlined "Spoilers at zero" says half of Russian parties work with zero financial balance, their reports to the Central Electoral Commissions show; p 3 (500 words).

5. Another editorial headlined "Good riddance" says commuter trains are being cancelled in many parts of Russia. Small private bus companies can replace trains in the regions where roads are available; p 6 (300 words).

6. Andrei Zubov opinion column headlined "Slavic winter" says the unrest in Ukraine has been caused by the authorities' unwillingness to strengthen the country's ties with the EU; pp 6-7 (1,500 words).

7. Konstantin Simonov opinion column headlined "Barrier for the young" says young Ukrainians would like their country to be closer to the EU, but the bloc itself has high unemployment rate among its young people; p 7 (500 words).

8. Irina Mokrousova and Galina Starinskaya interview with businessman and Federation Council senator Leonid Lebedev over his claims on a share from the sale of TNK-BP oil company to Rosneft; pp 8-9 (2,500 words).

Izvestia

1. Lyudmila Podobedova article headlined "Oil companies ask to protect them from Gazprom's appetite" says Rosneft, Novatek and LUKoil want to have equal access to underground gas storage facilities controlled by Gazprom; pp 1, 4 (815 words).

2. Sergei Podosenov article headlined "Paid informers to help defeat bribery" says experts from the National Anti-Corruption Committee have suggested that a number of measures should be taken to terminate the corruption in Russia. Paying informers who report on bribes is one of the possible measures; pp 1, 2 (874 words).

3. Alexei Krivoruchek article headlined "Army demands artificial intelligence" says the Defense Ministry economic analysis department will receive a new computer system to evaluate the efficiency of budget spending. The new software is to determine the way to spend the budget funds; pp 1, 6 (659 words).

4. Natalya Bashlykova article headlined "Ryzhkov does not want to reconcile with Nemtsov and Kasyanov" says Vladimir Ryzhkov and his supporters from the Republican Party do not want to reconcile with former allies from the People's Freedom Party Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov. Experts believe the opposition alliance has no future; p 3 (663 words).

Rossiiskaya Gazeta

1. Igor Zubkov article headlined "The slower you drive, the more you pay" says the Russian Union of Oil Industrialists has come up with an initiative to introduce social norms of petrol consumption and to sell fuel cheaper than the market price. The measure could help Russians cope with an

expected rise in petrol prices this year; pp 1, 2 (607 words).

2. Natalya Kozlova interview with head of the Moscow directorate of the Investigative Committee Lieutenant General Vadim Yakovenko speaking on crimes committed by migrants; pp 1, 13 (1,741 words).

Moskovsky Komsomolets

1. Marina Lemutkina article headlined "Scandal for entire Livanov's ministry" says that the Education and Science Ministry should have welcomed activists publishing on-line their findings about forged theses. But instead, the officials pretend that they are fighting against plagiarism and show no support for the initiative of the public activists; p 1 (592 words).

2. Natalya Rozhkova interview with politician and founder of the Republican Party Vladimir Ryzhkov speaking on his disagreements with former political allies, Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov; p 2 (569 words).

Komsomolskaya Pravda

1. Alexei Bogomolov interview with Moscow police chief Anatoly Yakunin speaking about the crime rates among illegal migrants, a shooting in a Moscow school and the fate of illegal casinos; p 1, 11 (1,200 words).

2. Viktor Baranets article headlined "Puzikov, Motherland awaiting your arrival" says that former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov's brother-in-law Valery Puzikov suspected of committing large-scale fraud has been put on a wanted list and speculates on his possible role in former Defense Ministry employee Yevgenia Vasilyeva's corruption case; p 10 (400 words).

3. Yelena Chinkova article headlined "CNN to buy photo of separated doorknob" reports on the supposed fake photos that foreign journalists covering the Winter Olympics in Sochi posted on the internet; p 9 (900 words)

4. Yelena Chinkova article headlined "Stop hammering Russians!" says that British readers have harshly criticized The Daily Telegraph for a sarcastic article about Sochi; p 9 (350 words).

Noviye Izvestia

1. Yelena Ryzhova article headlined "Should we move Felix?" reports on plans to return the monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet secret service, to its former place of honor in Lubyanka square; pp 1, 4 (300 words).

2. Vitaly Solovetsky article headlined "Shall we spare no expense?" says that Russian lawmakers intend to review a draft law introducing prison sentences for insulting the memory of the World War II; p 4 (400 words).

Trud

1. Viktor Churakov article headlined "They have come here in numbers" says that Swiss voters have narrowly backed a national referendum proposal to bring back strict quotas for immigration from EU countries and compares the state of affairs with immigration in Switzerland and Russia; p 2 (550 words).

2. Alexander Dmitriyev article headlined "Remember this word, Roslyakovo" says that Russian state-controlled energy giant Rosneft will start constructing shipyards in the village of Roslyakovo in Murmansk Region; p 3 (550 words).

1. Yevgeny Novikov et al. article headlined "Sochi requires new construction sites" says Sochi requires additional investments to become a viable seaside resort despite the fact that a substantial proportion of funds has been invested in the construction of Olympic facilities in the city; pp 1-2 (600 words).

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#9

Pew Research

www.pewresearch.org

February 7, 2014

Russia's moral barometer: Homosexuality unacceptable, but drinking, less so

By Jacob Poushter

[Charts here <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/06/russias-moral-barometer-homosexuality-unacceptable-but-drinking-less-so/>]

The Olympic Winter Games in Sochi have shone a spotlight on the status of gays and lesbians in Russia. In particular, attention has focused on the anti-homosexual "propaganda" law, which was approved by the Russian parliament in a 436-0 vote last June. While President Vladimir Putin has defended the legislation as non-discriminatory, the measure has generated a significant backlash among Western countries and Olympic athletes.

But when it comes to public opinion in Russia, newly released data from a 2013 Pew Research Center survey suggests a similar reaction is unlikely: nearly three-quarters of the Russian population (72%) think that homosexuality is morally unacceptable, with only 18% saying it is acceptable or not a moral issue. In Russia, homosexuality tops the list of unacceptable behaviors even in comparison to other controversial issues, such as abortion and alcohol consumption. In fact, extramarital affairs (69% unacceptable) and gambling (62%) are the only other issues tested that are frowned upon by a majority of the Russian people.

This sentiment cuts across Russian society. Nearly equal numbers of men and women and young (18-29) and old (50+) think homosexuality is morally unacceptable. In addition, 65% of Russians with a college degree think homosexuality is immoral, while 75% without a college degree concur. Even among those Russians who think religion is not too or not at all important in their lives, 65% say homosexuality is wrong.

Russians generally agree that extramarital affairs and gambling are also unacceptable, but they are more divided when it comes to abortion and alcohol usage. Both are seen as morally unacceptable by 44% of the population, but 35% and 39% respectively say these are acceptable or are not a moral issue.

There is a stark gender and age divide on attitudes toward drinking which has long been an issue troubling Russian society. About half of Russian women (52%) say drinking alcohol is morally wrong, but only 36% of Russian men agree. And 52% of Russians over the age of 50 also say drinking is morally unacceptable, while only 39% of those under 30 say the same. A recent study published in The Lancet medical journal reinforces evidence "that vodka is a major cause of the high risk of premature death in Russian adults," and a quarter of Russian men die before they are 55, mostly due to alcohol.

On the issues of premarital sex, divorce, and contraceptives, Russians are on balance accepting of these practices. Four-in-ten say sex between unmarried adults is an acceptable moral practice, while 46% agree that divorce is morally acceptable. And a 62%-majority think contraceptive use is proper, with only 7% saying that using a contraceptive is a morally unacceptable action.

Note: This data will be published in a forthcoming report that looks at global attitudes towards morality more broadly.

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#10

Foreign Ministry calls for unbiased coverage of democratic processes in Russia

MOSCOW, February 10. /ITAR-TASS/. International human rights activists should be unbiased in their coverage of democratic development in Russia, Russia Foreign Ministry's Commissioner for Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law, Konstantin Dolgov and Deputy Director of the Europe and Central Asia Division at Human Rights Watch Rachel Denber agreed at a meeting on Monday.

The sides discussed significant human rights issues of mutual interest - Dolgov commented on some human rights aspects in Russia, while Denber noted the importance of objective broad-minded coverage of democratic development and civil society formation in Russia.

Denber received the ministry's report on human rights in the European Union in 2013, which highlights a number of grave human rights problems in the EU countries, such as increasing Neo-Nazism, extremism and other forms of intolerance, as well as stalling, despite urges of the international community, discrimination of Russian-speaking community in the Baltic countries.

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#11

Russian NGOs have many issues with transparency - Transparency Int'l
February 11, 2014
Interfax

The Russian branch of Transparency International has started studying the transparency of Russian non-governmental organizations (NGO) receiving EU grants, head of Transparency International office in Russia, Yelena Panfilova, said.

"Due to the fact that Russia has many organizations receiving not just Russian budget funds but also EU budget funds, which are distributed by the European Commission to support NGOs in other countries, we have decided to look at what the transparency standards are," Panfilova told Interfax on Tuesday.

The Russian branch of Transparency International will hold studies in three groups - NGOs receiving presidential grants, socially oriented NGOs receiving grants from the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, and NGOs receiving budget funds from the European Union, Panfilova said.

When holding such analysis, a comparison of which NGO is more transparent is not raised, Panfilova said. "We found this interesting not in terms of comparison but rather in terms of correlation," she said.

Certain conclusions, based on the analysis of transparency of NGOs using domestic grants, exist, Panfilova said.

"We wanted to see how transparent and accountable this entire system is and what society can see. Having looked, we have found out that very many issues exist. We have realized that it is necessary to continue the research on the information transparency levels, and for now we analyze it alone - in other words, having a website, contact information, management structure - we have

found out the most organizations do not have even this," Panfilova said.

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#12

Russia's State Duma to review second reading of government bill on NGOs

MOSCOW, February 11. /ITAR-TASS/. Russia's State Duma on Tuesday will review the second reading of the government bill on additional reasons for unscheduled checks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Earlier, the house committee for public associations and religious organizations recommended the parliament to approve the 2nd and 3rd reading of the document.

The first reading took place in October 2013.

If adopted, the new legislation allows an inspection of NGO if an authorized agency receives information from government or local self-rule bodies about a violation by non-governmental organization of Russian legislation or the presence of signs of extremism in its activity. Inspections can also be carried out upon the request of election commission.

In addition, an NGO inspection is substantiated by an order by head of an authorized body, issued in accordance with presidential or governmental instruction, or a prosecutor's demand for unscheduled check.

Under the effective legislation, unscheduled checks can only apply to NGOs - "foreign agents." The authors of the bill believe that their amendments allow for observing the constitutional principle of equality of all before the law.

According to the Justice Ministry, 6,497 NGOs were checked in 2012, or 3% of registered NGO. Just 206 NGOs (3%) were subjected to unscheduled checks. "Under the effective legislation, an authorized body has no opportunity at present to timely respond to the information about violations of Russian laws by non-governmental organizations, which considerably reduces the effectiveness of federal supervision over NGO activity," the authors of the document underlined.

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#13

Ice hockey draws special interest at Sochi Olympics - IOC

SOCHI. Feb 11 (Interfax) - Ice hockey is drawing special interest at the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, International Olympic Committee's Director of Communications Mark Adams announced.

The presence of National Hockey League players is the brightest chapter in the Games, he said, adding that the Russian team is brilliantly prepared.

"Undoubtedly, it is a rare chance for Russians to watch NHL ice hockey players on the ice here in Russia, and this is expected to draw a large number of fans. We are looking forward to seeing all of them," said the Organizing Committee's vice president, Aleksandra Kosterina.

It is very important for Russian fans to see the Russian team in the finals, she said.

"I hope, as everyone does, that Russia will qualify for the finals. It is very important for us. Like Canadians, most Russians are mad about ice hockey," Kosterina said.

Russian ice hockey coach Zinetula Bilyaletdinov's team will play versus Slovenia's national team

on February 13.

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#14

In Nod to Sochi Costs, Ovechkin Values Hockey Gold at \$50 Billion

SOCHI, February 10 (R-Sport) - What's a gold medal worth at the Sochi Olympics? \$50 billion, if you're Russian hockey star Alex Ovechkin.

That's approximately the reported cost of staging Russia's first Winter Olympics and, for Ovechkin, it will all pay off if only Russia can win the men's hockey gold medal game on February 23.

Russia has not won the gold since the Soviet victory at Calgary 1988 and Ovechkin, the Washington Capitals forward, said after training in Sochi that "It means gold only costs \$50 billion."

The Russian government estimated the infrastructure and hosting costs for the Games at \$51 billion last year, although Russian officials and the International Olympic Committee have since said that direct hosting costs amount to only \$6.4 billion.

Russia begins its hockey tournament on Thursday against Slovenia in the preliminaries, before taking on the United States on Saturday and Slovakia on Sunday.

Ovechkin trained on the same line as Pittsburgh Penguins center Evgeni Malkin and Caroline Hurricanes wing Alexander Semin on Monday.

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#15

Putin wants surge of interest in Sochi to be turned into positive trend

SOCHI, February 10. /ITAR-TASS/. President Vladimir Putin said the surge of interest in the Russian Black Sea resort city of Sochi, which is playing host to the Olympic Winter Games now, should be capitalized on to turn it into a positive trend.

"It is important to make sure that everything that has been created over the past six to seven years is used effectively and properly as the flow of tourists grows," Putin said at a meeting with the Sochi 2014 Public Council on Monday, February 10.

He recalled that 86 large ships capable of carrying 2,500-3,000 passengers had already been chartered in Sochi compared to a half of that only several days ago.

"We see a booming interest in Sochi. And we should understand what else apart from the new facilities can attract tourists," the president said.

He believes that the Olympic Games would be only the first step, but the trend needs to be developed further. "It must be carried on," he added.

Putin stressed that the infrastructure created in Sochi over the last several years would help bring in tourists and noted that the number of hotel rooms had doubled. "Major hotel chains have come here, and they are creating conditions that will help redirect tourist flows from other Black Sea resorts to here," Putin said, adding that these were economic, not administrative, methods to attract tourists.

"I think we can achieve this goal and make Sochi an all-season resort," he said.

The president said that the project to develop Sochi and the whole of the Krasnodar Territory, of which it is a part, had proved successful.

"On the whole, the project has proved successful, at least in the sense that we built and did everything we planned to build and do," he said.

The president noted that "an enormous amount of work" had been done, much of which had been planned back in the 1980s as part of the region development program.

"At the same time, even such a big country - it was 40 percent bigger than today's Russia in terms of area and economy - even the Soviet Union could not implement that project. But we did it and used the Olympic Games as a pretext for allocating necessary resources for the development of Greater Sochi and the whole coast," Putin said.

He said that auditing agencies should look into the Olympic expenses to see whether they were overstated or not. "Indeed, very large amounts of money were invested. Let us not say now whether it was worth doing it and whether the prices were overstated or not. Let the auditing agencies do it, and they will do it," the president said.

He expressed hope that the infrastructure "will serve people for decades to come and maybe even hundreds of years as it does in some European countries."

Putin noted that it had taken years for other countries to create similar infrastructure, but Sochi did it in five to seven years.

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#16

Kremlin.ru

February 10, 2014

Meeting with the Public Council for the Preparation of the 2014 Winter Olympics

Vladimir Putin met with representatives of the Public Council for the Preparation of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. The Council was established on the initiative of Sochi residents to voice their opinions on the issues of greatest importance for the city.

The meeting was held at the Sochi Media Centre, which was opened for journalists not accredited at the Olympic Games. At the Centre, journalists can get all the latest news about the competitions and talk with athletes and visitors to the Olympics.

Before the meeting with the Public Council began, Vladimir Putin visited the Media Centre's working area. Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov, who was accompanying the President, reported on infrastructure modernisation at the Sochi seaport (where the Media Centre is located) and the construction of a sea and cruise passenger terminal. The President also saw a model of a Formula 1 race track, which is expected to start hosting competitions as from October this year.

Excerpts from transcript of meeting with representatives of Public Council for the Preparation of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games

PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA VLADIMIR PUTIN: Good afternoon, friends,

I could call you colleagues really too, since we worked together on the Sochi project. I say that we worked together because I know from the reports from my aides and staff that after the Public Council was established it was in direct communication with the builders and the Games' organisers and in one way or another influenced what was happening in the city as far as the residents' interests were concerned.

I know that the residents have had to bear a burden during all of this work, and I thank them for bravely and patiently enduring all of this, but for all of the difficulties, the project has been a success overall. It has been a success in any case in that everything that we planned did indeed get built. The actual sports event itself is not over yet, and we must continue our work through to the closing of the Olympics, and then on through the Paralympics, but as far as preparing for holding these big events goes, the project has been completed.

There are still a few things that need to be fully completed, it is true, and I will say a few words about this, but overall, a tremendous amount of work has been done. You probably heard and know that much of what was accomplished here was actually planned back in the late 1980s, when it was still the Soviet period. These plans were not linked to any sports events but were part of a project to develop southern Russia, then still the southern Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was 40 percent bigger than today's Russia in terms of area and the size of its economy, but even a country as large as that was unable to carry out this project.

Today, we have carried out this project and, as I have said many times, we used the Olympic Games as a reason for investing the needed resources into developing the Greater Sochi area and to a large extent this whole coastal region, though we have concentrated more on Sochi and the surrounding area of course.

I know that the people who lived right in the areas where today's events are being held had many questions and problems. We tried to be as accommodating as possible in settling these issues, taking into account people's interests and giving them sufficient compensation to ensure they would get decent housing to replace what they had before, on the sites where Olympic facilities were built. As far as I understand the situation, people have received housing of a quality much better than what they had before.

I do not know if there are still questions in this respect, but if there are, although the Olympic facilities' construction is already complete now, I am willing to come back to these questions and discuss any issue concerning protection of Sochi residents' interests and the interests of concrete individuals who lived or live in particular areas.

The second thing we have achieved is significantly improving infrastructure. I suppose I don't even need to talk about it; you can see it for yourselves. Before, we had all these plans on paper, or even on the ground, but it was unclear how it would appear; but now it is clear. We have invested a truly large amount of money. We will not talk now about whether these were excessive sums. Let the supervisory bodies address this; they will continue to look into it.

What's important is that it has been built and it is functioning. And I very much hope that this will serve people for many decades to come, and perhaps even centuries, same as in several European nations where this kind of infrastructure (as members of the International Olympic Committee have stated), took 100 to 150 years to build. We have succeeded in building it in six or seven years. It includes highways, railroads up to the mountains and railroad infrastructure improvements in Sochi itself, the construction of railroad station complexes - a new one in Adler and several stations along the railway up to the mountains. And all of it has been created at the most modern technological level.

We have improved energy supply. You already know, of course, that we have built two gas pipelines: one at the bottom of the Black Sea and another in the mountains. And local residents are well aware that electricity supply has basically been disrupted every winter, because there were constant breaks in the mountains. I hope we will now minimise the risks of these adverse events, since we now have a gas supply here and we have created new energy infrastructure - I am referring to the new power station and eight substations, as well as new grids. Although here, too, much remains to be done.

What's very important is improving the environmental situation. According to some indicators, things have improved many-fold. For example, the air quality has improved three- or four-fold. Even the quality of water in the Mzymta river has improved significantly. Why? Because we created the transport infrastructure I talked about. You know what the roads leading to the mountains were like: winding and dangerous. But their being dangerous was not the problem, although that is also very important; the roads were bad because people would brake sharply and so this increased emissions. When you have a modern, straight road, cars travel with minimal emissions into the atmosphere. The same is with railways. This type of transport is fairly environmentally friendly, and as it can transport a significant number of people, these people don't use cars, which helps the environment.

And of course, we have the port. You have seen the new port we built in the Imeretin Bay. The airport has been renovated and a new building has been constructed. So I think we can achieve the goal we set for ourselves, to turn the city of Sochi into a year-round resort, so people can holiday here any season, summer or winter, using this improved road and railway infrastructure to reach the mountains. Now, even people who come to spend their winter holidays in the mountains can take advantage of the hotels located here, in the city of Sochi itself.

As for hotels, you are also well aware that we increased hotel capacity two-fold. Today, Sochi hotels can accommodate 41,000 guests, compared to approximately 24,000 we had earlier; the number has essentially doubled. And I would like to point out that these are new, modern hotels and, importantly, they include major international hotel chains, which are providing a high, international, European level of service and are creating the conditions for people to change their habits from vacationing at other resorts in this same Black Sea and Mediterranean region to coming here.

Last year, a record number of Russian tourists visited Turkey: 4 million people. This has to do with the events happening in the Middle East, including in Egypt - the number of tourists there is decreasing. I suppose it is not without reason that people are afraid of going there, but fortunately, the situation in Turkey is stable. Still, it would be nice to reorient a significant part of that flow through economic methods, rather than administrative ones (closing off and not letting people go), by really creating new, more favourable conditions for vacationing, first and foremost, for Russian citizens, in their own country.

Incidentally, international experts in the hospitality industry, tourism and sports are pointing out that unlike many similar places, Russia now has a certain advantage. This advantage lies in the latest technology we used in building the corresponding structures, buildings, and sports infrastructure. Everything was done using the most modern equipment and the most cutting-edge technology and materials, which makes Sochi stand out favourably compared to other resorts around the world, including European ones, at least at this stage.

That is what I wanted to state at the beginning. But I wanted to meet with you to thank you for our joint work. And I know that during your contacts with your colleagues, including Mr Kozak [deputy prime minister responsible for holding the 2014 Winter Olympics] with whom you met recently, you have been constantly discussing and raising various questions. And if any ideas come up during these discussions, which you feel are important to implement here or in other Russian regions, let's discuss those ideas. Although Sochi-related matters are certainly on the agenda, we will now have the very important question of the so-called Olympic legacy. It is important that we use everything that was built here in the last six to seven years wisely and effectively, so that the flow of tourists will increase.

Just now, I was told there are currently 86 large ships chartered here in Sochi - each capable of taking 2.5-3 thousand passengers. Just a few days ago, there were applications from only 32 ships, but now, we have 86; so the interest in Sochi is booming. And we must understand what features and perks of Sochi itself will attract people, aside from the newest infrastructure - and not just immediately following the Olympics. You know, when the Olympics are over, people are always interested: where was it, what does it look like? And people who didn't make it to the Olympics are

happy to make the trip. But it is important for all of it to continue in the years and perhaps even decades to come.

Let's discuss this, please.

<...>

I have just been talking to Georgian journalists, or rather they asked me right here what we think about the arrival of athletes from Georgia. Naturally, we are only happy and wish them success.

I have already said this and would like to repeat that I believe the Olympics is a very positive development in this sense. As you may know, we now have regular flights between Tbilisi and Sochi. We presume that they will remain in operation in the future as well. All this will create conditions for normalising relations with Georgia, our closest neighbour, a country we have had lasting and close ties with for centuries. We are very eager for the tragedies of the past years to recede into the past. We understand that this is not a simple process, but the Russian leadership is set on a positive development of our relations with Georgia.

<...>

A theory took shape in 'cold war' times - it was called the deterrence theory. This theory and practical actions were aimed at hindering the development of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, now we are seeing the same thing - the remains of this deterrence theory tend to come out into the open here and there. Whenever Russia demonstrates any positive development, the appearance of a new strong player, of competition is bound to cause concern in the economy, in politics and in the security sphere. We see attempts to deter Russia here and there. Unfortunately, this had to do with the Olympic project and the Circassian factor was used as an instrument.

However, frankly speaking, as soon as I realised that such attempts are being made I did not have any doubt that this was a futile attempt. I know what the mood is among the Circassians, I know the leaders of the Circassian organisations personally, and I know what their attitude is to both their native land and to their home country - Russia. It was obvious for me that this had no prospect.

<...>

I will say a few words about the ethnic component. It is important not only for Russia, although in Russia this may be of special importance due to the multi-ethnic nature of our state. Even experts find it hard to state the exact number of ethnic groups living in this country. There are definitely more than 160, but the exact number is yet to be established.

As I have said, this is a very sensitive issue for all countries, even for mono-ethnic ones. Take such a large European country as Germany - is it mono-ethnic? It is. Nevertheless, problems with representatives of numerous other ethnic groups that live there arise all the time. I will not go into the situation in, say, Holland or Italy, where the number of immigrants is so big that even such a large European country with population of about 60 million people cannot handle them on its own. Today this is a growing global trend that has to do with open borders and the consequent relocation of large numbers of people.

Russia was initially formed as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, as opposed to European states. Even North America is different - though, I believe, the situation there is somewhat better because it has been essentially an immigrant state. I strongly hope that this culture that we have in Russia of cohabitation, of being part of a huge expanse and the understanding that ethnic groups, big and small, only benefit from living together as a single state - all this is a very important factor of the strength and stable development of the Russian state. What you said is correct: first we are citizens of Russia and then - representatives of this or that ethnic group, which does not diminish in any way the significance of the cultural identity of each ethnic group.

REMARK: One does not rule out the other.

VLADIMIR PUTIN: Not only that, but one complements the other.

(In response to a question whether there will be a gambling zone in Sochi) As for the specific

question, who are the people that usually ask this kind of question? The investors, who have spent a lot of money, and we have to admit it: 26,000 new hotel rooms have been built, bringing the total number of rooms in Sochi to more than 43,000. These are mainly private investors: banks, financial institutions and private companies, and they want to get their money back as soon as possible and with profit. Therefore, what they need to do is either sell these assets or operate them intensively. Obviously, having a gambling zone here would help them significantly.

At the same time, we agreed that we have a gambling zone on the border between Rostov Region and Krasnodar Territory, and later on, we even agreed to extend this area to the Black Sea coast. I do not find it feasible to set up another gaming zone here, although I do admit that it would make it easier for the investors to return their money.

There is also another concern I would like to draw your attention to: the thing is that such gambling zones generally, and in Russia specifically tend to attract a certain type of people.

REMARK: Criminals.

VLADIMIR PUTIN: Not necessarily criminals, though they too are of course attracted to such places. I am referring to a very peculiar crowd. I am not saying they are good or bad, some may be even quite comely, but they are a peculiar lot. This would minimise or even completely take away the chance for families with an average income, or even higher, to come here for a family vacation with their children. This might significantly complicate holidaymaking for families with children. The atmosphere here is different and I would hate to lose it. That is one concern.

The second has to do with those same banks and companies that invested here and want a return on their investment as soon as possible, therefore they are willing to keep the prices at a certain level. However, if there is no gambling zone here they will have to limit the growth of prices to increase the number of visitors. I believe this is a factor that would help turn the Greater Sochi area - both the coastal and the mountain areas - into a family resort for average-income people, as well as those with below-average incomes or slightly above average. I think it is important for this place to be a family resort.

We have invested a lot of money into this area, and we did not do it for a limited group of people to be able to spend thousands of dollars here at casinos, but for the broad public, for average Russian citizens.

<...>

QUESTION: I have heard that the Regional Development Ministry is working on about ten pilot development projects for various regions: Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Samara, Irkutsk, I believe. These are agglomeration development projects for various territories, and we would like to ask you to put Sochi on the list for these projects.

VLADIMIR PUTIN: The answer is no, because we have invested billions, dozens of billions of rubles here! While the projects you mention [tourism development programmes] are simply designed to allocate additional funds for the development of tourism in promising but insufficiently developed regions of the Russian Federation, while funds are limited. So imagine us taking money from, say, Altai Territory to invest yet again here in Sochi, where dozens of billions have already been invested. With all my love for Sochi, I believe we have to develop it in other ways, and you cannot expect any additional investment after such huge amounts of money have been spent here. I am being frank with you.

REMARK: Too bad.

VLADIMIR PUTIN: No, nothing bad here. Do you know why? I will tell you what you have to do - you have to use it efficiently. The money from the federal budget is allocated to the territories to develop their infrastructure, to build bridges, roads and tunnels. Here we have already built 150 kilometres of railroads, almost 300 kilometres (286, I believe) of highways, created new sewage and water supply

systems and built power stations.

You see, the money envisaged in these projects is incomparable to what has been spent in Sochi, and we cannot take it away from other regions in favour of Sochi. This would not be statesmanlike; it would be unfair to the people living in those other areas. More importantly, we believe this would not be a very wise decision because we have immense opportunities for tourism, but tourism in the country is underdeveloped. Those funds are intended to more or less evenly develop other parts of the Russian Federation as tourist areas.

Meanwhile our job here in Sochi is not to pour even more money into it, but to maintain the efficient functioning of the infrastructure that has been created. We have to start using everything we have created, and do it efficiently. This does not mean, however, that this is the last time we invest in Sochi. We will continue, of course, but we need to understand how all this is going to function after the Olympics, we have to have it all operating properly, and then analyse and adjust our future actions accordingly.

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#17

Olympics-Criticism of Games reflects "Cold War" mentality-Putin

By Mike Collett-White

SOCHI, Russia, Feb 10 (Reuters) - Western criticism of Russia's Winter Olympics was reminiscent of Cold War ambitions to hold the Soviet Union back, President Vladimir Putin said on Monday, despite signs that the world was warming to the most expensive Games ever held.

The buildup to the Olympics in Sochi on the Black Sea coast has been overshadowed by threats of Islamist militant violence, an international outcry over a contentious "anti-gay propaganda" law and allegations of widespread corruption and profligacy.

As the third full day of competition drew to a close, that hostility had begun to melt away and the thrills and spills on snow and ice, and a hugely popular Russian gold in the team figure skating on Sunday, began to win the critics around.

Monday's biggest drama was undoubtedly in the men's 500 metre speed skating at the Adler Arena, where, in a Dutch sweep of the medals, Michel Mulder beat Jan Smeeckens by one hundredth of a second, having initially been announced as second.

"It was a kick in the gut," said Smeeckens, who thought he had won for about "two or three minutes" before the scoreboard adjusted his time. "I was so ecstatic that I won, I can't describe it."

Mulder's twin brother Ronald grabbed bronze as the Dutch continued their dominance of the sport.

The excitement did not stop Putin, who has staked his personal and political prestige on a successful Games, from taking a swipe at his detractors, suggesting he was still smarting from criticism he always maintained was unfair.

"Back in Cold War times the theory of containment was created," he told a televised public meeting in Sochi.

"This theory and its practice were aimed at restraining the development of the Soviet Union... what we see now are echoes of this containment theory. This, unfortunately, has also applied to the Olympic project."

Putin also said the Olympics were playing a "positive role" in relations between Russia and its 2008 war foe Georgia, emphasising that he believed flights set up between Sochi and the Georgian

capital Tbilisi should continue after the Games.

CANADA ON TOP

A day earlier, the 61-year-old had been all smiles, as state television captured him congratulating the victorious Russian skaters, "high fiving" with young volunteers, drinking beer and urging the home team to greater sporting glory.

On the team was diminutive 15-year-old Julia Lipnitskaya, whose breathtaking performance melted hearts and had commentators in the United States, as well as Russia, gushing over a superstar in the making.

"Good job guys, my congratulations to you all," Putin said, addressing the winning team crowded around him. "You have a lot of work ahead of you here, so don't relax."

But there were no more gold medals for Russia on Monday.

Defending champion Alex Bilodeau led a Canadian one-two in the men's freestyle skiing moguls, putting his country atop the medals table with three golds, three silvers and a bronze.

France claimed its first title of the Games when Martin Fourcade won the biathlon 12.5km pursuit. Ole Einar Bjoerndalen of Norway finished fourth to miss out on what would have been a record 13th Winter Games medal.

In the high-velocity, notoriously unpredictable sport of short track, Canada's Charles Hamelin grabbed 1,500m gold before lunging over the barriers to wrap his girlfriend and team mate Marianne St-Gelais in a hug.

Germany's Maria Hoefl-Riesch retained her Olympic super combined title with a slalom surge amidst the peaks of the Caucasus mountains

In Tuesday's action the first-ever medals in women's ski jumping will be awarded, in the normal hill competition, one of eight golds up for grabs.

The American and Canadian heavyweights of the men's ice hockey competition had their first practice on Monday with attention already turning to Saturday's mouthwatering clash between the U.S. and Russia that will bring back memories of the "miracle on ice" at Lake Placid in 1980 when the Americans shocked the dominant Soviets to win 4-3.

WINNING LOCALS OVER?

A Russian victory in that game would further enhance the mood among locals. Even some of those worst affected by years of disruption caused by huge infrastructure projects in Sochi appear to be won over by the gleaming new Olympic park.

"It's just fantastic," Sergei Klyuyev, from the Adler area where the park was built, said as he walked through with his family on Sunday, admiring the state-of-the-art stadiums.

"There's been building work here for five years but look at all this around us. We regret nothing, not even the cost."

Putin wants to use Russia's first Winter Games, which cost \$51 billion to stage, to project the country as a resurgent nation that belongs among the world's elite powers.

He has defended the scale of the project, saying it helped shield Russia from the worst of the financial crisis.

Not all Russians are convinced, however. A recent survey by independent pollster Levada showed 47 percent of them believe the cost of the Games has soared because funds have been embezzled or mismanaged.

Norway, bidding to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, said in Sochi on Monday it would limit its budget to around \$5 billion.

Included in Russia's eye-watering Winter Games costs is a major security operation, as Islamist militants based in nearby Chechnya and other North Caucasus regions have threatened to launch attacks on Sochi.

Some 37,000 security personnel are on high alert in and around Sochi, although officials believe the risk of militant violence is greater elsewhere in Russia.

A major attack during the Games would embarrass Putin, who launched a war to crush a rebellion in Chechnya in 1999.

Russian police killed four suspected militants in a shootout in Dagestan province, some 600 kilometres (380 miles) from Sochi on the other end of the Caucasus Mountain chain, law enforcement officials said on Monday.

There was no indication the gun fight on Saturday was connected with the Games

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#18

Russian president's spokesman says proud of Sochi Olympic infrastructure
Interfax

Moscow, 10 February: The scandals and nerve-wrecking events surrounding the Olympics have faded into the background, replaced with pride for the facilities constructed, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitriy Peskov has said.

"This is an utterly extraordinary event. I am looking at what is happening and a sense of pride overtakes me. And all the nerve-wrecking things, all the scandals - it seems like they are all fading away into the background," Peskov said in an interview with the [liberal] radio station Kommersant FM.

"We were here a month ago and there was a lot of dust hanging in the air in the Imeretinskaya lowland, and only now have I realized that Putin understood this from the very beginning: to hell with it - with the dust - the rain will wash it off in a year while all this will stay here for many decades for our country," Peskov said.

Peskov said he was sure that more and more people would understand that.

"I saw them start with a swamp in the Imeretinskaya lowland, in the same place where the stadiums and the Formula 1 tracks are standing now, where the hotels are and so on. I saw impassable dirt in the mountain cluster when all that was there were two shoddy houses. Frankly speaking, no-one believed that this would happen, it was so difficult," Peskov said.

At the same time, he stressed that the future of the Olympic facilities would depend on their effective management by the government and their owners.

"On the one hand, the Olympics may help. On the other hand, the games could have no effect. Everything will depend on successful management, both at the government level and at the level of

the owners," Peskov said.

He added that the first several years after the Olympics would be difficult in terms of profitability, which means for Sochi it is "very important to tough it out, to stand strong".

"For private sector investors, it will be very hard to get their money back [initially], but I am sure that after some time we will see global-level competitive prices here," Peskov said.

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#19

World warms to Sochi through Lipnitskaya's grace

By Julian Linden

February 10, 2014

SOCHI, Russia (Reuters) - At every Olympics, Summer or Winter, there is always one person who stands out from the rest, an individual who becomes an irresistible and enduring reminder of the Games.

That "Face of the Games" is an unofficial accolade that is decided not by judges or by referees, but by public opinion.

For the past year, the face of the Sochi Olympics has been the Russian President Vladimir Putin - but no longer.

In his place, a pint-sized Russian teenager has emerged, melting hearts around the world in a way no politician ever could.

Just as Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut did at Munich in 1972, Julia Lipnitskaya is changing the perception of Russia, not through force but through grace.

Virtually unheard of before the Games, the 15-year-old is on her way to becoming the next global phenomenon after helping Russia win gold in the figure skating team event.

Although she was on a Russian team packed with stars, Lipnitskaya stole the show on Sunday with a performance so breathtaking it is being seen as the icebreaker the Sochi Olympics needed to win over a skeptical world.

At the end of her routine the packed crowd inside the Iceberg, the gleaming stadium staging the figure skating events, instinctively rose to their feet for a thunderous ovation, tossing bouquets and teddy bears onto the ice.

As banks of press photographers clamored for the best shot of the sport's new darling, Lipnitskaya waved to the crowd and flashed a sheepish smile.

Putin personally congratulated her and she was mobbed by Russian media, with local newspapers and television dubbing her the 'little genius'.

Russians love their figure skaters but the rest of the world is smitten with Lipnitskaya as well.

GLOBAL FASCINATION

Around the globe, her name and footage of her routine was trending on social media sites while American television commentators were gushing about the arrival of a superstar who is sure to drive ratings through the roof in the sport's biggest market.

By winning the team event, Lipnitskaya became Russia's youngest Winter Olympic gold medalist, and the youngest gold medalist in figure skating for 78 years.

She is now favorite to win next week's individual title, one of the blue-riband events of the Winter Olympics.

In a sport decided by the subjective scores of judges, star appeal can be the difference between winning and losing and Lipnitskaya has it all.

Petite, standing 5ft 2in tall, she looks like a real-life Russian doll, charming the crowds as much with her poise and precision as her rubbery flexibility and athleticism.

In the short program, she completed all her mandatory jumps and spins with consummate ease before blowing away the opposition in the free skate.

In the long program, she played the role of the doomed little girl in the red coat from Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List who seems oblivious to the horrors of the Holocaust.

By her own admission, Lipnitskaya's performance in the team event was not perfect, yet it was spellbinding enough to win over the judges, who awarded her with the second highest score ever given to a female figure skater.

Lipnitskaya becomes the latest in a long line of athletes who have helped shunt politics into the background after the Sochi Games began with questions over Russia's "gay propaganda" law and criticism of their \$50-billion price tag.

Nazi Germany leader Adolf Hitler hoped to use the 1936 Summer Games in Berlin to promote his ideals of racial supremacy and had threatened to ban blacks and jews.

Yet, it was a black American athlete, Jesse Owens, who is remembered as the star of the Games after winning four track and field gold medals.

COLD WAR

In 1972, the hostility of the Cold War was starting to ease with the United States and the Soviet Union agreeing to an era of detente.

At the Munich Olympics that same year, Russian gymnast Olga Korbut emerged with perfect timing, capturing the hearts of the western world with her three gold medals and inspiring a generation of girls to take up gymnastics.

She was invited to the White House to meet President Richard Nixon, who told her that her captivating performances had done more to improve relations between their two countries than anything the politicians had managed in years.

Four years later, at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, another petite eastern European became the center of attention after more than 20 African countries had boycotted the Games.

The African states were protesting against the International Olympic Committee's decision not to suspend New Zealand for sending their national rugby team to South Africa when it was banned for apartheid.

Into this came Nadia Comaneci, who won three gold medals in Montreal and is forever remembered as the first gymnast to be awarded the perfect score of 10.

There was no shortage of celebrities at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. Jamaica sent a bobsled team which became the inspiration for the movie 'Cool Runnings' and a British skijumper Eddie "the Eagle" Edwards developed a cult following for finishing so far behind all his rivals.

But the face of the Games was the East German figure skater Katarina Witt, who won her second individual Olympic gold medal and was described by Time magazine as "the most beautiful face of socialism" while reclusive North Korea issued commemorative stamps featuring her image.

BATON HANDED OVER

While most athletes are recognized as the face of the games for sporting success, there are some exceptions. The most notorious was Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson, who was stripped of the gold medal he was awarded for winning the 100 meters at Seoul in 1988 after testing positive for drugs.

Cathy Freeman became the face of the 2000 Sydney Games after she was unwittingly thrust into Australia's 200-year struggle for reconciliation between blacks and whites.

As the country's most prominent Aboriginal sports person, Freeman reluctantly accepted her role even though the pressure on her was overbearing at times.

She was selected to light the Olympic flame, an honor that only increased the intense interest in her, then won the 400 meters gold against the backdrop of 100,000 flashing cameras to fulfill her own dreams.

In doing so, she joined the likes of Owens, Korbut and Comaneci by helping to change the hopes and perception of an entire race, and now the baton has been handed to Lipnitskaya.

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#20

Forbes.com

February 11, 2014

Enjoy Julia Lipnitskaya's Performance? A Leading Russian Oppositionist Thinks That Makes You A Nazi

By Mark Adomanis

It's still relatively early in the Sochi Olympics, but the star so far has been Julia Lipnitskaya a diminutive fifteen year old figure skater from the Urals. While the adoration hasn't been unanimous, most people have, understandably, been awed by her performances. Lipnitskaya combines technical proficiency in skating with the sort of mind-warping flexibility one usually associates with elite gymnasts. She performed on an entirely different level from her competitors, and while the individual competition hasn't yet started in earnest, Lipnitskaya now appears to be the odds-on favorite to win an individual gold medal. To sum things up, an awful lot of people watched Julia Lipnitskaya skate and an awful lot of people were very impressed.

Now if you are a normal adult human being, Julia Lipnitskaya's performance has nothing whatsoever to do with politics, the Kremlin, or the dread Vladimir Putin. But one of Russia's leading "liberal" opposition figures, Viktor Shenderovich, has a slightly different opinion. Writing in Yezhdevny Journal, Shenderovich penned a column called "Putin and the girl on skates" [<http://ej.ru/?a=note&id=24384#>] that, more than anything I've seen in a long time, helps explain why Russia's liberal opposition remains marginalized, unpopular, and irrelevant. The column is a bit on the rambling side ("How can I not understand that Lev Tolstoy, the constructivists, and a fifteen year old beauty on skates were summoned to make us completely forget about the current thievery and bloodshed?") but the main point is fairly encapsulated by the following excerpt:

"I really enjoy this girl on skates. Really! But if you only knew how, in the summer of 1936, Berliners

enjoyed the shot putter Hans Welke, the first German gold medalist in track and field, a handsome guy who liked to smile and who symbolized the youth of a new Germany!

"Something, however prevents us from enjoying his victory. We're now aware of the final price of this sporting accomplishment - a price which includes Dachau, and Coventry, and Leningrad. Through no fault of Hans, of course, but it turned out that he contributed."

Now it just so happens that our friend Hans Welke actually did directly contribute to the horrors Nazism: he was apparently an officer in a police battalion that committed numerous war crimes in occupied Belarus and Ukraine. So, taken at face value, Shenderovich is saying that Julia Lipnitskaya is morally equivalent to someone who served in one of the German army's "pacification" units on the eastern front. Ioffe's criticism, to which I linked earlier, comes across as fawning praise in comparison to such a vicious and idiotic smear.

But even if dear Hans hadn't been a Nazi war criminal but had instead been a pleasant young fellow who minded his own business, Shenderovich is still spouting nonsense. Modern Russia unfortunately has a large number of flaws and its government engages in often reprehensible conduct. You'd have to be blind, deaf, or dumb not to recognize as much. But you have to be positively unhinged to compare anything that happens in Russia today to Nazi death camps or to a war of conquest that left tens of millions of innocent people dead. Official corruption and the prosecution of political rivals are bad but they're not nearly as bad as industrial mass murder. Saying "Putin is Hitler!" isn't a compelling criticism of Russia's government, it just makes you sound like an idiot.

But I don't want to focus on the simple wrongness of Shenderovich's "argument," since it should be self-evident to anyone with even a cursory knowledge of 20th century history. What fascinates me about the column is its complete political tone-deafness. Here you have a popular young athlete who has met with near universal praise from Russians and foreigners alike. Lipnitskaya could very well become a household name and an international superstar. Shenderovich's first instinct upon seeing such an athlete is not say "nice job," or even to ignore her, but to write a column for a popular and well known website in which he compares her to Nazi war criminal. These, suffice it to say, are not the instincts of a successful politician. It's like seeing the Miami Heat win the NBA championship and writing a rambling column in which you bemoan the rotten and corrupted state of American politics and our country's failure to deal with the horrific legacy of the Tuskegee experiments: most people won't simply think you're wrong, they (with some justification) will think you're crazy.

Is it really mysterious why a political movement which counts Viktor Shenderovich as a prominent member hasn't fared very well? Now it is true that not every member of the Russian opposition has been similarly outraged by a fifteen year old figure skater. Quite a few anti-Putin activists reacted with surprising warmth to the opening ceremony and to the early success of Russia's athletes. But Shenderovich serves as a useful expression of the movement's id. Russian liberals often appear to have instincts that border on the anti-political, they act in ways that seem calculated to maximize the number of opponents and minimize the number of supporters. Does that sound too strong a statement? Well, what do you call launching an attack on a Olympic gold medalist during the Olympics? If that's not politically tone-deaf what is?

In reality Lipnitskaya's performance has nothing whatsoever to do with politics. You can love her skating and loathe Putin or loathe her skating and love Putin because women's figure skating and Vladimir Putin are (thankfully) two totally separate and unrelated entities. The Russian opposition will be a lot healthier and more successful when it realizes as much, and when it stops picking fights that it is inevitably going to lose.

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February 11, 2014
Shape Up Sochi
By Betsy McKay

SOCHI, Russia-The Olympics are supposed to inspire people to shape up and go for their inner gold, right?

In Russia, that's a big "if." A quarter of men here die before they're 55, largely from drinking too much vodka. More than 60% of men and 22% of women over 15 smoke.

Stats like that are precisely what has prompted a local organization called "Choice" to set up a health expo on a sidewalk in downtown Sochi during the Games, just across the street from a long ticket line for Olympic events. "What is your bio-age? Find out today," reads a banner advertising the event. Several other banners lining the sidewalk explained the benefits of avoiding cigarettes and alcohol, of drinking water, exercising, relaxing and eating healthy food.

"The Olympics inspire people to take care of their health," reasoned Andrei Prokopyev, a volunteer who was marching up and down the sidewalk Monday with an enormous inflatable cigarette covered with antismoking messages like, "Every cigarette shortens a smoker's life by 12-14 minutes."

Prokopyev, a former smoker, has been pressing that message for months in Sochi, campaigning for a smoke-free ordinance that the city recently adopted. Snuffing out the habit here is no easy feat: Despite the new law, residents still freely light up. Cigarette smoke wafts through Olympic Park, too, though alcohol restrictions have kept most of the booze at bay.

Often people on vacation just want to do whatever will help them relax, Prokopyev said. "They equate the word 'vacation' with 'smoking.'"

Now he sees an opening. Because of all the sporting events, "there's a very favorable atmosphere here," he said. "People here want a better life."

Dozens of Russians were having their height, weight, and blood pressure measured on Monday afternoon as part of the free program. They stepped up and down repeatedly on a stool while a volunteer monitored their heart rates.

"It's useful-they showed us how nicotine gets into the lungs," said Natalya Ilyina, a 32 year-old smoker from Sergiev Posad, north of Moscow, who is in Sochi for a week to watch Olympic events like the biathlon-but not to quit smoking.

At the end of the line, a volunteer input all participants' measurements and results into a computer program, which spit out the age their bodies really are.

"For me it's probably 90," said Inna Tishkova, a 68 year-old doctor as she waited with her husband for her results. "I'm healthy but overweight," she said.

Sure enough-the computer said she should be 82. As for her husband, Eduard, a 77 year-old retired nuclear sub commander, the computer said he should be 79. "You should stop drinking alcohol," said the volunteer who gave him his results.

"Give up beer?" Mr. Tishkov said. "What are you trying to suggest?"

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AP

February 10, 2014

By DAVID BAUDER AP Television Writer

His experiment in television with NBC over for now, David Remnick leaves Sochi on Tuesday to resume his day job as editor of The New Yorker magazine.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of "Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire" participated in some studio discussions with host Bob Costas about some of the political issues surrounding the Olympics, including the threat of terrorism and Russia's law barring gay "propaganda."

Most effectively, he joined "Today" show hosts Matt Lauer and Meredith Vieira to provide historical context about the messages the host country was trying to convey Friday during the opening ceremony.

"I know there was focus to some degree on the one (Olympic) ring that didn't open," he said in an interview. "Thematically, from what I understand, what Russia and (President Vladimir) Putin wanted out of this was to show a developing, modern country capable of putting on as good a show as Sydney or England or the rest. Politics aside, that's another set of issues, I think they did."

It was clear, too, the Russians wanted to "bobsled past the events that are very dark," Remnick said. So while the presentation depicted industrialization that took place in the early Soviet era, Remnick was able to talk about the heavy price many Russians paid.

"The debate over history, the question of what is usable in the past and what is not and what is being skipped over - without beating the viewer over the head about it - was, I thought, important to point out," he said. "I hope not to have been heavy-handed."

Remnick was the Moscow bureau chief at The Washington Post between 1988 and 1991 and the assignment hasn't left him. He's returned to Russia several times for New Yorker pieces, and is reporting during his current trip.

He said he enjoyed working with NBC, but doesn't expect it to be a regular gig. The next summer Olympics is in Brazil, not one of his areas of expertise.

Jim Bell, executive producer of NBC's Olympics coverage, said he was thrilled by Remnick's contributions.

"We hired David because this is a complex part of the world and there's a lot of history to understand," Bell said. "He made us smarter and made the audience smarter."

It's a complex area for NBC to navigate, too. The network received some online criticism for a piece about Russia narrated by actor Peter Dinklage that was aired before the opening ceremony. In the piece, Dinklage referred to Russia's communist revolution as "one of modern history's pivotal experiments."

The decision not to make a value judgment on the United States' Cold War enemy struck some viewers, including Florida Republican Sen. Marco Rubio, as wrong. Rubio tweeted the introduction seemed to be written by Putin. "Pivotal experiment?" he tweeted. "Really, no, it was an evil empire that murdered and oppressed."

Remnick said he did not participate in the piece and had no comment about the criticism

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#23

Moscow Times

February 11, 2014

Olympic Ceremony Without World War II

By Andrei Malgin

Andrei Malgin is a journalist, screenwriter and blogger.

Those who had become accustomed to viewing Russia through the prism of state propaganda got a surprise from the opening ceremony of the Sochi Olympics. As one observer wrote, "We unexpectedly saw Russia without Putin."

In Sochi, the world saw a cultured, civilized and vibrant country. There was no sign of babushkas wrapped in shawls giving the sign of the cross and wailing pseudo-folk songs, no Cossacks with whips, no socialist realism, no portrayal of Stalin as an "effective manager" and most amazingly - no reference to the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War. In short, we saw no sign of the very things President Vladimir Putin's regime has been carefully cultivating in an attempt to earn the devotion of the Russian people or else protect them from the harmful influence of the outside world.

The theme of the Soviet people as "liberators" was also conspicuously absent, although just days ago the Kremlin banned cable operators nationwide from broadcasting the Dozhd channel because it recently conducted a survey asking if Russia should have surrendered Leningrad to the Nazi forces in order "to save hundreds of thousands of lives."

Putin's propaganda machine has taken World War II as its main theme and declared 1945 as the Russian people's greatest victory. That is no surprise: with no significant accomplishments to point to from Putin's long years in power, the regime must look to the past to find them. But how did it happen that the great victory in World War II was entirely absent from the script of the opening ceremony?

Given recent events, the very idea of purposely excluding it was so unthinkable that commentators have spent considerable time debating the question over the past few days.

The first theory, that foreigners scripted the entire opening ceremony for a foreign audience, was clearly impossible considering that nothing of significance happens in Russia without prior Kremlin approval. Many people liked the second theory, that Putin finally realized the futility of setting the "chosen" Russian people in opposition to the rest of the world and decided to place universal human values in the forefront. Unfortunately, that too was disproven.

In a couple of interviews, head of the Channel One and opening ceremony general producer Konstantin Ernst revealed that Russia had proposed the theme of the "Soviet soldier liberating the world from fascism," but that the International Olympic Committee had categorically rejected it in any form.

It turns out that the Russian organizers had been holding out until the very last moment for permission to declare a moment of silence right in the middle of the ceremony. The authors of that scenario proposed that all 40,000 people sitting in the stadium would have stood up and honored those who had died in a war that ended back in 1945. They were to have held up 40,000 individual portraits of fallen Soviet soldiers that had been previously placed on their chairs. The organizers did not worry about the fact that the guests would have spent the greater part of the ceremony sitting on the faces of those dead heroes, or that many portraits could have been trodden under foot or disrespectfully tossed in the trash as people left the stadium.

Fortunately, the IOC was adamant that there can be no war theme at the Olympics. The organizers had planned to make this extravaganza the culmination of the entire ceremony, but they were forced to delete it entirely.

It turns out that all the optimists were rejoicing in vain. The authorities will continue to torment us with reference to our "fallen forefathers," patriots will continue to write "looted" on BMW and Mercedes-Benz automobiles, war archives will remain closed to the public and the authorities will continue to persecute writers and artists who express the least doubt or make even a slightly ironic comment about the great victory of more than half a century past.

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#24

Russian State TV Journalist Plagiarizes Nationalist Website

MOSCOW, February 10 (RIA Novosti) - A reporter for Russia's leading television channel admitted lifting huge chunks of a nationalist report about the Sochi Olympics' opening ceremony for use in her own report, which aired over the weekend.

Irada Zeinalova said she quoted a report by Kremlin-bashing web resource Sputnik & Pogrom without attribution for a broadcast on Channel One.

The report "found such true and subtle words about the Olympics that you could wish for nothing better," Zeinalova said in a Facebook post that later was deleted.

She apologized for unattributed quoting and said she "faced the music" with channel management, which has not commented publicly about the scandal.

Sputnik & Pogrom's report, published Saturday, praised the ceremony for a pro-Western slant and avoidance of rampant conservatism that is at the core of the Kremlin's current domestic policy.

Both the website and the presenter touted the event, in particular, for presenting "aristocratic Russians" to the world, as opposed to kitschy stereotypes about balalaikas and "aggressive drunken soldiers."

Sputnik & Pogrom directly accused Channel One of plagiarism on Monday, but said no legal action was planned because the channel de-facto helped spread their ideas.

Russian nationalism has largely been a marginal political trend over the past two decades, championed by neo-Nazis and radical anti-Semites.

Sputnik & Pogrom, active since 2012, is Russian nationalism's most successful attempt to cross over into the political mainstream, with tens of thousands of likes on social networks.

The website offers a mix of glossy magazine-style posters, hard-hitting opinion pieces and translations of analytical pieces from Western magazines such as Foreign Policy.

It advocates secularism and Western-style democracy as prerequisites for creating a "Russian national state," and vehemently opposes the regime of President Vladimir Putin due to its alleged corruption and devotion to the concept of a "multinational state."

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#25

Moscow Times

February 11, 2014

Ex-Olympian Rodnina Apologizes For Racist Twitter Picture

By Anna Dolgov

Irina Rodnina, the famed figure skater who lit the Olympic flame at the Sochi opening ceremony, has said that a racially insensitive tweet sent from her account and featuring U.S. President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle was posted by hackers.

The doctored - and, in the eyes of many, crudely racist - image, which showed the Obamas looking at a banana, prompted international outcry when it appeared on Rodnina's Twitter page five months ago. The skater subsequently defended the post, also via Twitter, as an expression of freedom of speech.

She seemed to have an about-face on Monday, breaking from her usual practice of tweeting in Russian to post an apology in English.

"I respect the Obama family and apologize for not clearly stating earlier that I don't support the tweeted photo or racism in any form," Rodnina tweeted.

"My account was hacked, and I should have shown better judgement in my initial response and handling of the event," she added in another message.

It was unclear if Rodnina had any help writing the English-language tweets, but her U.S.-raised daughter Alyona Minkovski, a news show host on HuffPost Live, circulated the apology and stepped in to defend her mother.

"My mother is neither a racist nor a homophobe. I think the tweet was extremely insensitive, and we've addressed it as a family," Minkovski tweeted Saturday.

Rodnina - a winner of three successive Olympic gold medals and 10 successive World Championships - is a State Duma deputy, and after the picture was posted online last September, a member of a Moscow district council took to Twitter to apologize "in the name of Russian parliamentarians" for Rodnina's tweet.

At the time, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul called Rodnina's tweet "outrageous behavior, which only brings shame to her parliament and country."

Following Rodnina's disowning of the tweet on Monday, some skeptics expressed doubt over the sincerity of her apology.

"Combined picture of Rodnina's lies about her racism. Now she claims hacking. Before she appealed to freedom of speech," Russian journalist Yevgeny Feldman said via Twitter in an English-language post.

At last fall's Silver Galosh ceremony, which is organized by radio station Serebryany Dozhd to single out public figures for their dubious achievements, Rodnina was named one of three winners in the "biggest intolerance of the year" category.

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#26

Carnegie Moscow Center

February 11, 2014

The Russian National Hobby-to Build Potemkin Village

By Lilia Shevtsova

I think that despite the mocking depictions of unfinished Sochi hotels that lack running water and sport cracks in the walls, the Kremlin will succeed in creating the image of the Fairy Tale Russia. And millions of TV viewers will actually believe in this fairy tale. Its creators will use sporting events

and glittering shows to amaze millions of people-both in Russia and overseas-and get them hooked on Russia's great-power mystique. But people will be amazed by Putin's Russia-the country that belongs to the Kremlin and its main resident.

After watching the Olympics' opening ceremony-a 3-hour long spectacle that featured 5,000 participants-many of my friends told me in unison: "This is the most brilliant performance I have ever seen!" They are not President Vladimir Putin's admirers at all; nevertheless, they were amazed. Actually, this is exactly what the Kremlin political strategists want. They did not need a performance that glorified Putin. The show that they created sought to engender patriotic sentiments, which can always be exploited to the regime's and state's advantage.

But the opening ceremony was indeed a fairy tale-an artists' myth of Russia that does not exist. The popular Russian joke that proclaims Russia to be the elephants' birthplace which means that Russia is an embodiment of absurdities is actually about the Olympic Russia. It is the place you cannot really find in reality. It is the Potemkin village that the Russian elite have become so experienced in building through the centuries.

The real Russia is quite another animal. It is the first in the world when it comes to:

- * depopulation;
- * abandoned and orphaned children;
- * mentally ill and cancer patients;
- * human trafficking;
- * heroine consumption;
- * road accidents;
- * tobacco consumption;
- * pedophiles;
- * child alcoholism.

At the same time, Russia is also first when it comes to generals, billionaires, direct individual investment in foreign countries, as well as whiskey imports.

Welcome to the Sochi Olympics!

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#27

Window on Eurasia: Sochi Marks the Return of Soviet-Style Megaprojects

Paul Goble

Staunton, February 11 - Even before he was chosen to lead the CPSU and hence the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1984 said he opposed the kind of megaprojects Soviet leaders had used up to then and favored instead more balanced development, a shift in attitude that informed his subsequent decision to block Siberian river diversion.

His decision had other consequences as well: it eliminated one of the means Soviet leaders had used to promote patriotic feelings, and it reduced one of the main channels of the inter-regional transfer of resources. But it gave rise to the hope that Moscow would not sacrifice services for the Soviet population on the altar of such leadership projects.

Both Gorbachev and his first Russian successor Boris Yeltsin followed that approach, the first out of conviction and the second because of the absence of resources or agreement on what might be done. But now as the Sochi Olympiad shows, Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, clearly wants to return to the megaproject approach.

That shift - and Sochi is only the largest and most prominent of the projects of this kind the Russian president has pushed --raises at least three questions: First, why has Putin made this shift? Second, what will this change mean for the Russian Federation if it extends, as seems likely, beyond Sochi? And third, can his government carry it out?

The reasons Putin has made this shift to megaprojects are clear. On this as on other issues, his thinking reflects his belief that Russia made a mistake in turning away from many Soviet ideas and should at least selectively draw on what worked in Soviet times as it moves toward the future.

But he clearly is driven by two other ideas as well. Megaprojects of the Soviet kind for all the waste they involved and all the distortion in the flow of resources they led to were inspirational, and Putin certainly believes that such projects not only can promote patriotic feelings among Russians but impress outsiders with Russia's power.

And he also sees, and this is not so much something new as a vast expansion of what was true of some Soviet megaprojects, especially in Brezhnev's time, that such efforts are an effective means of winning support among elites by giving the Kremlin the opportunity to divert resources into the hands of officials and business leaders and thus keep or win their loyalty.

If Putin views the Sochi megaproject as a model, what might that mean for the Russian Federation as a whole? Gorbachev's critique of that approach provides a useful place to start. The last Soviet leader saw megaprojects as problematic for at least three reasons. First, such projects often failed to do more than win short-term propaganda points.

Second, they took money away from the basic social needs of the population and thus fed anger and even resistance on the part of many. And third, they represented an often unacknowledged transfer of resources from one part of the country to another without any consideration of the impact of such shifts on the people and leaders of the donor region.

Returning to such an approach now almost certainly will exacerbate all these problems not only because the center has much less power than it did in Soviet times but also because the losers will be increasingly likely to complain and exploit the new media to generate support for their views, at the very least triggering the intensification of center-periphery struggles.

But the largest question is this: can Putin pull this shift off and make megaprojects work for him and his country? Gorbachev dispensed with them largely because Soviet leaders had not been able to do so. Instead, while they clearly won short-term propaganda victories with them, projects like the Virgin Lands or BAM were not nearly as effective as they were presented.

In the latest issue of "Ekspert," Aleksey Shchukin argues that Sochi shows that Russia has again "learned how to carry out megaprojects." He says that the country "completely succeeded in preparing all sites for the Sochi Olympiad" and thus can launch other such projects in the future (expert.ru/expert/2014/07/nauchilis-delat-megaproektyi/).

Other observers, Russian and international alike, are less certain. They point not only to problems in that construction effort, including its inefficiencies, waste and corruption, but also to the likelihood that the Sochi effort, like those of other Soviet-era or Soviet-style megaprojects, will fall far short of the promises Putin and his regime have made for it.

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#28

National Public Radio

www.npr.org

February 10, 2014

So Far At The Games, A Low-Key Response To Russia's Anti-Gay Law

Leading up to the Olympics in Sochi, a dominant storyline was Russia's anti-gay propaganda law and what it might mean for athletes and other visitors. Would athletes protest in any way? Would Russian LGBT activists try to demonstrate against the propaganda law at the Olympics?

The answers (so far, at least) are: barely, and not really.

On Friday, Dutch snowboarder Cheryl Maas, who is openly gay, , displaying a rainbow and a unicorn.

But there have been no pronouncements in favor of gay rights at news conferences or on medal stands yet. And LGBT activists aren't entirely surprised.

"Do I want to make a statement at the end of my event or do I want to hold up a 6?" says Olympian David Pichler, referencing Principle 6 of the , which calls for nondiscrimination. "Thinking about that distracts you from your focus, and they don't need to do that."

Pichler competed in diving in the 1996 and 2000 Games. He is gay and came to the Sochi Games to see for himself how gay athletes and visitors were being treated. So far, he and his colleagues from Human Rights First have felt safe as they've taken in women's ice hockey and a women's snowboard slopestyle competition.

"We're not here to cause some type of activity or ruckus," says Pichler. "We don't want to disturb the athletes, either."

The most prominent public mention of the anti-gay law came on the day competition began. In a news conference, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak predicted the games would be safe. Then he reaffirmed his support for the anti-gay law while seeming to conflate homosexuality and pedophilia.

"Nothing will happen," he said. "Any adult has his or her right to understand their sexual activity. Please do not touch kids. That's the only thing."

The Russian government set up a protest zone far from the Olympic Park, in a neighboring town at least 20 minutes away by train. And by all accounts it hasn't been getting much use. On the day of the opening ceremony, four Russian LGBT athletes were arrested as they tried to unfurl a banner displaying Principle 6. But they weren't in Sochi - they were more than 1,000 miles away in St. Petersburg.

The group visiting from Human Rights First met with one of the activists the day before the attempted protest and arrest. So, says Shawn Gaylord, advocacy counsel for the group, he isn't surprised not to see any LGBT activism around the Olympic Park.

"It's hard to even imagine as you look around the park, like, what could there be that would establish an LGBT presence other than a demonstration, which would get shut down as soon as it starts?" he says. "I think it's a smart move [for Russian activists] not to spend all of their time and money getting people down here for such a little payoff."

He still thinks it's possible that sometime in the next two weeks an athlete will make a public statement. But there was probably way more conversation about LGBT issues in Russia before the Olympics than there will be during - because now the sports have taken over.

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#29

New York Times

February 10, 2014

Two Founding Members of Pussy Riot Respond to Criticism

By MELENA RYZIK

Hours before they departed the United States, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, founding members of Pussy Riot, responded sharply to a letter that other members of that Russian activist collective had posted online and sent to journalists. The letter disparaged some of the behavior of Ms. Alyokhina and Ms. Tolokonnikova, who are now advocating for prison reform, as unbecoming of the radical feminist group, which became known across the world after its members were arrested for performing a protest song in a Moscow cathedral in 2012.

The letter "doesn't follow the ideology of Pussy Riot," Ms. Tolokonnikova said in an interview on

Sunday, in Russian. She also took issue with its claims that she and Ms. Alyokhina no longer speak to other members of the group. "The people we performed with in Moscow, we're still in contact with," she said, adding that she didn't know who wrote the letter. It was signed by six anonymous individuals, some of whom used the same pseudonyms that she and Ms. Alyokhina once did.

Ms. Tolokonnikova and Ms. Alyokhina also disputed the idea that Pussy Riot was, as the letter states, a seemingly closed-off "all-female separatist collective."

"Pussy Riot can be anyone, and no one can be excluded from Pussy Riot," Ms. Tolokonnikova said. "Pussy Riot can only grow."

Since their release from prison in December, Ms. Tolokonnikova and Ms. Alyokhina have emphasized that they are acting under their own names, and not as part of a mysterious collective. Far from anonymous, they are still hardly celebrated back home in Moscow.

"We live the same way other people do in Russia - we take the metro, we walk around," Ms. Alyokhina said. "In terms of our everyday life, it's no different than it was before. Although we do get recognized occasionally."

But in their few days in New York, they were the outsize attractions at every event they attended.

"I didn't even want to meet them - I didn't want to ruin the mystique," said Questlove, who came to a benefit in their honor on Thursday at the Spotted Pig thrown by the Voice Project, a nonprofit that promotes social change through music.

It drew the likes of Maggie Gyllenhaal and Peter Sarsgaard, Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth and James Murphy of LCD Soundsystem, as well as other supporters, like Tim Hayes, an owner of CBGB, and a sponsor, with Amnesty International, of a benefit concert at Barclays Center. Questlove, who helped raise money for the Voice Project, which supported the women through their incarceration and their time in New York, did see them at the party, and worried that they would be seduced by their celebrity.

"Hip-hop was once a rebel voice, to sort of be the news of the people," he said. "If hip-hop got corrupted, anybody can get corrupted."

Ms. Tolokonnikova and Ms. Alyokhina visit prisons wherever they go. (They toured Rikers Island on Saturday, at the behest of Mayor Bill DeBlasio.) "What we'd like is for other people who have this same kind of microphone - this celebrity - to stand up" for the disenfranchised, "too," Ms. Alyokhina said.

Before their departure on Sunday, they hung out with Marina Abramovic, filling her in on their advocacy for Russian political prisoners, especially those arrested in a peaceful demonstration against the election of the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, in Moscow on May 6, 2012. Those prisoners have been treated much more harshly than Pussy Riot ever was, Ms. Alyokhina said. They deserve attention "more than we do," she said.

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#30

Washington Post

February 11, 2014

For Pussy Riot members, no more taking freedom for granted

By Katrina vanden Heuvel

Editor and publisher of the Nation magazine, vanden Heuvel writes a weekly column for The Post

If an appearance on "The Colbert Report" is a measure of success, then Pussy Riot has arrived.

Fresh out of prison, Nadya Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, two members of the Russian punk protest group, were in New York last week for a whirlwind tour. After winning over Colbert and his audience, the duo spoke at Wednesday's all-star Amnesty International concert at Brooklyn's Barclays Center, where they were introduced by no less than Madonna.

It was quite a shift from the last "stage" the women appeared on together: a Moscow church in 2012, where Pussy Riot put on a protest performance and were subsequently arrested and imprisoned for "hooliganism." They were released on the eve of the Winter Olympics and have since been quite public in their criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The real story, however, isn't their vocal, vehement opposition to Putin. It's what they're doing with their freedom. The women have been on an international journey of sorts - not to "breathe fresh air and enjoy ourselves" but to visit prisons in other countries and bring what they learn back to Russia.

Along the way, they've been talking about the conditions they endured in jail - including hunger, physical abuse, forced gynecological exams, subzero temperatures - as well as the suffering of their fellow prisoners. As a New York Times editorial noted, "Their observations are reinforced by the State Department's 2012 human rights report, which said that limited access to health care, food shortages, abuse by guards and inmates, inadequate sanitation and overcrowding were common in Russian prisons, and that in some the conditions can be life threatening."

There's no doubt that Russia has a long, notorious history of brutal prisons. But America isn't exactly a model for incarceration policy. Human rights groups have documented the harsh sentencing, discrimination and abusive conditions pervading a prison system that has become a burgeoning for-profit business. Women, in particular, are at risk; a recent Justice Department report accused an Alabama women's prison of horrific, rampant sexual abuse of inmates.

Still, in the face of an unjust system, advocates on the front lines of U.S. prison reform are doing exceptional work, and their efforts are instructive. Indeed, at a news conference in New York, Alyokhina said, "We're very interested in the fact of how NGOs in the U.S. work and collaborate with penitentiary institutions. One of our main goals is to exchange experience."

The Correctional Association of New York's Women in Prison Project (WIPP) would be a great place to start. (Full disclosure: I am on the board of the organization.) WIPP monitors conditions in New York's women's prisons, and has helped enact important laws, including one that bans the abhorrent practice of shackling pregnant prisoners in labor. The group also advocates for programs and policies that keep the families of incarcerated women together.

This is especially challenging because many New York prisons are located upstate, while inmates tend to be from New York City. Since the elimination in 2011 of a free community bus program, loved ones, especially children, have an even harder time visiting prisoners. Regular family visits are a crucial component of rehabilitation; according to a report by the Vera Institute of Justice, prisoners who receive them are less likely to commit prison violations.

The trauma of having a mother in prison is only compounded by the trauma of rarely getting to see her. As Tamar Kraft-Stolar of WIPP says, for an 8-year-old to take a long, overnight bus trip upstate to see his mom, "It might as well be going to Siberia."

Of course, had Tolokonnikova's young daughter visited her in prison, it would have involved an actual trip to Siberia, where Tolokonnikova was serving time in a penal colony.

And that's what makes this moment - and the pair's activism - so powerful. They understand firsthand what it's like to survive inhumane imprisonment, and they want to use their fame, however sudden and unexpected, to shed some light on an often overlooked problem. For those focused on prison reform in Russia, the United States and around the world, their advocacy opens up new

opportunities to elevate the issue and share lessons across borders.

At the Amnesty concert, Tolokonnikova spoke through a translator, saying, "Freedom is not a given. It is something we have to fight for every day. It is our duty to speak for those who are still behind bars." Let's hope these brave women continue to do just that.

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#31

Subject: On Mark Adomanis in JRL #28
Date: Mon, 10 Feb 2014 12:48:37 -0600
From: David Stone <stone@ksu.edu>

Mark Adomanis' piece from Forbes
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2014/02/09/why-pussy-riot-failed-in-one-chart/>)
that you included in JRL 28 uses Russia's increasing religiosity to explain Pussy Riot's failure.

I don't buy it.

Adomanis refers to a study from the Levada Center
(<http://www.levada.ru/24-12-2013/rossiyane-o-religii>)
which measures Russians' REPORTED religiosity. As should go without saying, there's a big difference between people's reported behavior and their actual behavior. That's even more true when official attitudes towards religion and the Russian Orthodox Church in particular have changed enormously since 1991. Put simply, there were all sorts of reasons for people to underreport their religious views and practices in 1991 and to overreport them today.

When you look at actual data, the situation is much different. A study by the SOVA Center measured actual attendance by Russians at Christmas services in January 2013. In Moscow, 280,000 people attended Christmas services, or 2-3% of the total population of the city. Compare that to the Levada Center's 31% of Russians reporting that they go to church at least several times a year.

For the SOVA figures, see
<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/how-many/2013/01/d26162>

There are lots of reasons why Pussy Riot hasn't gotten much traction in Russia. While Putin's policies have a lot to do with that, the movement's own insistence on total ideological purity (witness the recent open letter) and disdain for concrete organization might be involved as well. Before we explain things by increasing religiosity, though, let's see some actual evidence of increasing religiosity.

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#32

Business New Europe

www.bne.eu

February 11, 2014

Kaluga - Russia's regional pioneer

Ben Aris in Moscow

Moscow is home to much of Russia's wealth and has always been treated as a country and an investment destination in its own right. But over the last decade a handful of regions have got their act together and now are emerging as even more attractive to investors than the capital. Kaluga has a good claim on the title of "Russia's best region."

Located some 400 kilometres south of Moscow, Kaluga didn't have much going for it other than some fairly large military-industrial facilities following the fall of the Soviet Union and appeared mired in a middle rank of economic misery with the bulk of the country. However, Anatoly Artamonov, the Kaluga Oblast's energetic governor, has lifted the region up by its bootstraps, following a no-nonsense policy to bring in investment and improve the lives of the residents. "We didn't concentrate on success - we simply determined a path for development and followed it," says Artamonov in an exclusive interview with bne. "The region produced weapons and lots of unemployment. We understood that if the people were unemployed, then this would lead to a collapse and no money in the budget."

Artamonov should be more famous than he is, as he is clearly one of Russia's most capable administrators. Kaluga has risen from 48th place in terms foreign investment per capita in 2005 to being among the top few in the last three years. And Kaluga twice topped the tables in terms of industrial production per capita for the whole country, with annual growth of 145% in 2010 and 125% in 2011. "In the last few years, official unemployment has been one of the lowest in Russia; Kaluga is one of the regions of Russia where the number of jobs significantly exceeds the number of people willing to work," says Artamonov, who has been governor of the region since 2000.

In short, the region is flourishing. International car producers were the first major investors to move in, but recent years have seen the arrival of companies from the pharmaceutical, food processing, high-tech and fast-moving consumer goods sectors.

Grand Turismo

Kaluga is not an isolated case. With nearly a decade and half of strong growth in the bag and incomes that have expanded some 16-fold since the era of Boris Yeltsin, today that are some 28 regions with attractive investment climates out of a total of 83, according to a rating issued by Business Pulse in October. (Another 26 are deemed 'neutral' and 21 'negative'.)

Geography has played a role in Kaluga's success. Moscow is only 400km away to the north, providing a market the size of most countries in Central and Eastern Europe. But Artamonov complains that the capital is also a disadvantage, as it sucks out resources from Kaluga, especially well-qualified people, by offering better salaries.

So what is Artamonov doing right? After taking office, Artamonov did what most progressive governors do: he went on a world tour to see how success is achieved elsewhere, visiting other prosperous emerging markets to learn from their experiences, including China and South Korea, as well as more developed markets like Germany, Sweden and Finland. On his return, Artamonov set out a list of priorities. "We needed to invite investors to industry, as we need technology and new facilities. We also asked our Russian investors why they were not coming to our region. They said it

was a combination of heavy bureaucracy, corruption, lack of infrastructure (especially the difficulty of getting power), high taxes and inefficiencies in the labour force," Artamonov tells bne at the region's Moscow residence.

That list closely tallies with the worst results Russia scored in the factors that make up the World Bank's "Doing Business" ranking. So Artamonov's solution was to implement a liberal list of policies to make life easier for investors, including the building of industrial parks.

Role model

The bureaucrats in Kaluga's Moscow mansion joke that the building has the feel of a museum due to the constant stream of visitors, comprising potential investors but also increasingly apparatchiks from other regions curious to find out how Kaluga works its magic. Artamanov's programme has become a textbook case on how to develop a regional economy. "We invited investors to our territory and showed them there was no bureaucracy as everything was already built. They received all the permissions they needed from a 'single window' and we set up a consultancy [run by the administration] to liaise with the investors to deal with their problems," says Artamonov.

As for corruption, for which Russia is notorious: "In the last 15 years I have never heard one complaint about corruption in my region."

How so? Artamonov's solution was to put all supply contracts, permissions and tenders out in the open. All investors' deals go through a regional committee and are done in public. It sounds simple, but it's the devilish details that are the make or break of anti-graft measures.

And there is Artamonov's fail safe: he is famous for handing out his mobile phone number to any and all investors. If a company has a problem it can't solve on its own (aka the shakedown), it can call the governor directly. However, Artamonov says that he has never been called; no official appears willing to face the wrath of the governor, so the power to block and stymie is broken, leaving little space to extract a bribe.

Providing adequate infrastructure and eradicating corruption are probably the two most significant factors in Kaluga's attractiveness, but the region also offers significant tax breaks for investors. "The tax regime in Kaluga is a good deal for investors," says Artamonov. "They see the territory like the EU and maybe even better, as there is a cadre of people ready to work and a number of industrial clusters already in place."

The key reform was to create a series of business parks that come fully equipped with the infrastructure, power and IT needed to do business. A total of 134 companies - both domestic and foreign - have invested over \$7bn in facilities between 2006 and the first half of 2013 in the ten industrial parks that the region boasts.

>From the outset, Kaluga focused on the idea of building up mutually beneficial clusters, of which the automotive complex is probably the best known. Today, Kaluga's automotive cluster is ranked third in Russia in terms of output and brings together 28 companies including Volkswagen, PSA Peugeot Citroën, Mitsubishi Motors and Volvo. In addition, there is another layer of parts manufacturers that are springing up around this core and another layer of non-related manufacturers that have moved into the same business park.

Another thread in the cloth has been the region's focus on producing qualified workers for all these factories. Education remains a mainstay of the region's policy to attract investment. "Early on, we opened a training centre for automotive workers to produce the 'future employees' for the industry. 8,500 people were trained and now the other regions are starting to copy this innovation."

In addition to the technical university and vocational training, the governor also holds regular seminars and in-house training for the local administration's staff, who have to attend weekend

seminars once a month to study things like crowdsourcing and management techniques. "The training is designed to develop the right-hand side of the brain," says Artamonov, who has taken up painting in his spare time to help the development of his own right hemisphere.

Clusters of clusters

Kaluga has moved beyond establishing simple industrial parks and Artamonov hopes to develop clusters of clusters.

The automotive cluster is already self-sustaining and next up will be a pharmaceutical cluster, which is developing around the German firm Hemofarm, which already makes products not only for the Russian market, but exports to Europe and the US as well. Companies from the UK, Italy, Denmark and Sweden also have definite plans to invest in the cluster. "The point with industrial parks is they need to be diverse. If there is a crisis, then a mono-themed park will die, as there will be no work," says Artamonov.

And several other projects are in development. Artamonov has plans for the rail sector where the region intends to build rolling stock, locomotives and provide logistical services. Other new directions include logistics, mining equipment, power turbines, radio equipment, timber and paper production.

The second plank for the region's development is to focus more attention on promoting small and medium- sized enterprises. "SMEs are the most important factor for the stability of the local economy, as they provide profits and employment," says Artamonov. "SMEs already account for 30% of the gross regional production."

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#33

Moscow Times

February 11, 2014

Draft Bill for Postal Privatization Submitted

The Communications and Press Ministry has submitted a draft bill to the government that would reorganize Russian Post and pave the way for the flotation of the company's shares, Interfax reported Tuesday.

The move is part of an overall strategy that would not only make Russian Post financially independent by 2018, but would also propel it into the top five of the world's most profitable postal services.

Under the bill, all infrastructure belonging to Russian Post, which is currently a federal state unitary enterprise, would be registered to a newly-created joint stock company whose shares would be owned by the state.

"At present an inventory of all facilities is being undertaken," said Deputy Communications and Press Minister Mikhail Yevrayev. "We would like to initiate a public offering as soon as possible, but, objectively speaking, the process is likely to take about six months."

The ministry is looking into the possibility of attracting private investment in Russian Post, as well as the future public sale of securities, said Yevrayev, who oversees the postal sector.

Russian Post is keen to modernize its logistics network, increase the quality and speed of its delivery service and start to provide banking and public services in its branches.

The company will need 140 billion rubles (\$4 billion) to complete the upgrade over the next four years, but it won't be able to count on financial support from the state.

The planned transformation of Russian Post would enable the company to increase its revenue to 291 billion rubles, twice that of its revenue for 2012. Net profits would reach an estimated 19.6 billion rubles by 2018, compared to 300 million rubles for 2012.

In order for the public offering to go ahead, Russian Post will have to be excluded from the government's list of strategic enterprises whose privatization is banned. The ministry thinks that the company will be off the list by the end of the second quarter of 2014.

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#34

Russian government officials to take part in Krasnoyarsk economic forum in late February

MOSCOW, February 11. /ITAR-TASS/. Almost one-third of Russian government officials will take part in the Krasnoyarsk economic forum to be held February 27 - March 1, Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich told a news conference on Tuesday.

"Almost one-third of Russian cabinet officials - eight ministers and two prime ministers - will participate," Dvorkovich said, adding that First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov would also attend the forum.

"We'll participate in all interactive discussions. Hopefully, it will enable forum participants to bring home their ideas to decision-makers," Dvorkovich said.

The forum will address new sources of growth of the Russian economy, and the projects to develop Siberia and far eastern regions.

The government commission on transport plans to hold a session within the framework of the forum. "We'll discuss the key priorities of the development of the transport system and complete the coordination of the adjustment of the state transport development program while accounting for the instructions issued in connection with budget limitations," Dvorkovich went on.

According to the Russian official, he plans to meet with Dutch business representatives at the forum. "We have invited to the forum a large delegation of companies from the Netherlands and will hold a round table discussion devoted to the participation of these companies in implementing investment projects in Siberia and the Far East," the deputy prime minister noted.

Dvorkovich will hold these meeting as co-chairman of the Russian-Dutch intergovernmental economic cooperation commission.

Forum participants will also consider the development of small and medium businesses and Krasnoyarsk's preparations for the upcoming World Winter Students Games.

The Russian deputy prime minister did not rule out a thorough review of certain projects aimed at economic development of Siberian and far eastern regions.

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#35

Blouin News

<http://blogs.blouinnews.com>

February 9, 2014

Sochi brings railway magnate Yakunin to center stage

By Mark Galeotti

The Sochi Winter Olympics have done much to shed light on the workings of modern Russia, from the Kremlin's enthusiasm for expensive, high-profile 'megaprojects' to its favored tactics for dealing with potential terrorist threats. It has also highlighted the real movers and shakers of the regime, one of whom is Vladimir Yakunin, president of state-run Russian Railways (RZhD).

Although born in Vladimir region, Yakunin was raised in Leningrad (since renamed St. Petersburg), President Putin's home town. He trained as an engineer, worked for a while as a diplomat-as First Secretary at the Soviet mission to the U.N.-before taking advantage of the collapse of the U.S.S.R. to become a businessman. He parlayed his talents and connections effectively, becoming a member of the so-called 'Ozero' group who jointly own dachas around a lake near St Petersburg, a clique that includes not only Putin but a number of other key players.

Yakunin is undoubtedly rich, although his wealth is hard to estimate. His last confirmed income was \$1.5 million, but as his new villa at Akulinino alone is estimated to cost \$75 million, this is likely only the tip of the iceberg.

However, unlike many of the new oligarchs of the Putin era, Yakunin appears to have a genuine political agenda. A committed Christian, he is a key member of an informal group of powerful figures seeking to bring the Russian Orthodox Church and Kremlin closer together. To this end, he has encouraged Putin in his adoption of a more conservative social agenda.

Since 2005, he has been head of RZhD, one of the three largest transport companies in the world, with more employees than the Russian army and carrying over a billion passengers and a billion tons of freight every year. The railways are a crucial strategic factor in Russia and his role at RZhD-which has also meant that he chairs the railway coordination agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States as a whole-as well as his close relationship with Putin means that Yakunin has been described as one of the "informal ministers of the Russian government."

The Sochi project has underscored Yakunin's political capital. RZhD was responsible for the single most expensive infrastructure project, the \$8 billion road and rail between Adler (Sochi) and the Krasnaya Polyana venue. As well as receiving federal funds and permission to levy a surcharge on all regular railway travel to pay for it, this has meant that RZhD has emerged as a key stakeholder in the event.

Perhaps as a result, he has been at the forefront in responding to critiques of the Games, seeing a conspiracy "by those forces which are annoyed by Russia's successes" to use the Games "as a powerful instrument of pressure on public opinion." He also called for the prosecution of International Olympic Committee member Gian-Franco Kasper after he alleged that up to a third of the funds spent on Sochi were wasted or stolen.

The consequence of all this is that Yakunin's personal political capital and profile are higher than ever. At a time when the future of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev-who was embarrassingly filmed asleep during the Olympic opening event-may be in doubt, Yakunin's name is one of those being discussed as a potential successor and maybe even, some day, a president.

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#36

Tycoon Potanin donates most of his wealth for charity

MOSCOW, February 07ю /ITAR-TASS/. Interros holding owner Vladimir Potanin, whose fortune is estimated at \$14 billion, has handed over most of it for charity, the Kommersant daily writes on Friday.

A year ago, he said about such an option in the future, giving no further information. His wife Natalia's attorneys suspect the businessman of trying to conceal his assets in the divorce process started by him. Natalia Potanina already received permission in U.S. courts to begin searching for her husband's assets to sue him to divide property.

Potanin's confidant told the Kommersant his business assets had been transferred for charity purposes, with inheritance for his children taken into account. Details were kept secret.

"So, we want to find out when, what and to whom he has handed over, whether he really handed over, and whether this is related in any way to charity, or behind this is the wish to hide his fortune from the wife, creditors or the state for the purpose of so-called taxation optimization," the wife's attorney told the newspaper.

The Potanins have three children - 29-year-old Anastasia, 24-year-old Ivan and 15-year-old Vasily. Four years ago, in an interview to the Financial Times, Potanin stated he did not intend to leave his fortune to his heirs, but would hand it over for charity needs. In February 2013, he joined the Giving Pledge initiative of Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, promising to bequeath at least half of his wealth for charity. He said his family supported the decision, but at the time the businessman and his confidants said about donation for charity in the future.

On Thursday, February 6, Interros could not specify when the transfer was made.

As Itar-Tass reported earlier, Potanin late last year filed a divorce suit. According to the Forbes, he is among the 200 richest entrepreneurs. In 2013, the businessman was the seventh with a fortune of \$14.3 billion. Potanin is the owner and president of Interros, one of Russia's largest investment companies, which has stakes in the mining Norilsk Nickel company, the ProfEstate Group, the Cinema Park network of movie theatres, the Interport transport logistics company and the Rosa Khutor company. As of early 2013, the cost of Interros's assets totaled about \$15 billion.

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#37

RFE/RL

February 11, 2014

Endgame Nears In EU's Antitrust Showdown With Gazprom

by Charles Recknagel

The Russian natural-gas giant Gazprom has long had its way in Europe, dominating the continent's energy market and, according to critics, flaunting its rules with impunity. But that all might be about to change.

A long-standing showdown between Gazprom and the European Union over alleged price fixing and monopoly practices -- a dispute pitting Russia's post-Soviet business model against the EU's standards of free-market competition -- is quickly coming to a head.

The dispute is expected to heat up considerably this spring when the European Commission is due to release the findings of a two-year investigation into Gazprom. And the findings are not expected to be pretty, analysts say.

"I think we are going to see, first of all, a spectacular lump of bad publicity for Gazprom, because the complaints will list all of the bad things that Gazprom has been doing, then we will have fines,

which may be very substantial, and there will also be the opportunity for the companies that have been overcharged for gas to launch lawsuits against Gazprom over the extortionary prices that they have been charging," says Edward Lucas, international editor at the British weekly "The Economist" and author of the book "Deception: Spies, Lies, and How Russia Deceives the West."

Lucas, who has followed the dispute closely, says he expects the commission's findings to be published in May. After that, he adds, things should move quickly, because Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger and Competition Commissioner Joaquin Almunia, who are pressing the case, want to wrap it up before they leave office in November.

A negative report could have deeply unpleasant consequences for Gazprom, including hefty fines, bad publicity, and evidence competitors can use in lawsuits against the gas giant. It could also force the state-controlled company to change its long-standing practices on the continent.

Seeking to avoid this, Moscow is furiously trying to reach a preemptive settlement with the European Commission. Russian delegations have visited Brussels several times in recent months but the details of the negotiations have been shrouded in secrecy.

Busting Up The Monopoly

Brussels for years has let Gazprom operate with monopolistic practices in Central and Eastern Europe due to both historical and market realities that have been hard to change.

The main pipeline that brings Siberian gas across Ukraine to Eastern Europe was built in the Soviet era and is wholly owned and operated by Gazprom. The gas giant alone decides which providers in addition to itself can export gas through the trans-Ukraine pipeline and through the Nord Stream pipeline under the Baltic Sea to Germany.

That monopoly allows Gazprom, not free competition, to set the price its European customers pay. It also makes the gas giant tough to challenge, because it is the sole provider in much of its market and supplies a quarter of the European Union's gas overall.

So why is Brussels so ready to challenge Gazprom now? Agata Lokot-Strachota, an energy-policy analyst at the Warsaw-based Center for Eastern Studies, says one factor is a new sense of confidence within the European Commission's offices for energy and competition. "Brussels wants its law to be enforced, including in the gas sector," she explains. "And it does not really want an exceptional relation with any actor if it means that would require that some laws are not enforced."

Specifically, the EU wants to enforce its "third energy package" legislation, which went into force in late 2009 and aims to protect third-party access to pipelines. The legislation also aims at "ownership unbundling," or separating companies that produce energy from companies that transmit it.

East To West, Then Back Again

There are also economic reasons for Brussels to take a harder line with Gazprom. Thanks to its monopoly position in EU members states that once were Soviet satellites, customers there pay an average of 1 1/2 times more for their natural gas than do EU states farther west. The western EU market has multiple gas sources, including the North Sea, North Africa, the Middle East, as well as Russia. Transport includes both pipelines and liquefied natural-gas (LNG) import terminals.

Stephan Meister, a Russia expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin, says that the EU would like to open Eastern Europe to similar competition among multiple suppliers. "If there would be more liberalization there could be other companies, there could be Azerbaijani companies or Turkmen companies, or from elsewhere in Central Asia that send gas through [the Gazprom] pipelines," he notes. "So there are several possibilities to use the pipeline system [to promote competition] and other options are LNG terminals, which are discussed in Poland and in the Baltic

states."

In one immediate measure to break Gazprom's stranglehold on Eastern Europe, Germany is planning to send Russian gas it buys relatively cheaply from Russia thanks to competition to countries like Poland, which are locked into higher Russian gas prices due to Gazprom's monopoly. The idea of any "reversed flow" of Russian gas from west to east infuriates Moscow, but the first such Polish imports of gas from Germany are due to start on April 1.

An Unstable Equilibrium

Finally, Brussels is pushing now to tame Gazprom because the EU wants to keep it from expanding its monopoly still further in the future via its planned South Stream pipeline under the Black Sea to Southeastern and Central Europe.

Moscow already has angered Brussels by concluding bilateral transit agreements with numerous new and prospective EU member states for South Stream. The bilateral deals, which pay no heed to EU antitrust legislation, have also strained relations between Brussels and the states that have signed them: Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovenia.

Lucas says Brussels still expects the EU states served by South Stream to enforce antitrust laws against Gazprom retroactively, no matter what the bilateral accords say today. "If Gazprom wants to spend a lot of shareholders' money on building a pipeline in Europe at vast expense, that is fine, but it will be subject to EU law and any agreements with governments that contradict EU law will be illegal," he says. "South Stream isn't built yet, so no law has actually been broken. What [Brussels] will say is that if you go ahead and build this pipeline it will operate according to EU law."

The European Commission has become increasingly assertive in enforcing its antitrust laws against powerful foreign companies of late, most recently with the U.S.-based Internet-search giant Google. In an effort to avoid a heavy fine, Google was forced accept several antitrust measures, including agreeing that whenever it promotes its own search services on its pages in the EU, it will display the services of rival companies in a comparable way.

Will a similar approach work with Gazprom? Lokot-Strachota says the problem is that in this case, the two sides have fundamentally different approaches to business. "Both the EU and Russia represent completely different ways of thinking, there is a systemic difference between them," she explains.

"We can say that we will be living in equilibrium because both sides need each other, but it is quite an unstable equilibrium because both sides will try to persuade the other to make deals according to own rules. So it is quite hard to say what will be the final outcome of all that."

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#38

Financial Times

February 11, 2014

Sochi games will do little to normalise ties with the west

'Normal' games boost Kremlin but foreign policy tests remain

By Kathrin Hille in Moscow

The sighs of relief from Russian officials are almost audible as the foreign media turn to stories about proud locals and pictures of President Vladimir Putin partying with Austrian athletes instead of yellow tap water and missing hotel doorknobs.

The Sochi games are becoming a normal Olympic show after all.

It did not look like that just a few days ago. Any country deciding to host Olympic Games makes a conscious decision to place itself in the global spotlight. A government that spent more than any other Olympics host, struggled to complete construction on time, cracked down on the political opposition and presided over a sharp economic slowdown had to expect all these issues to hit the headlines.

But Russia, it seems, has got more than its fair share of bad press. Some international dispatches from Sochi about hungry dogs, clueless receptionists or instructions not to flush tissue down the toilet sounded derisive of a country that has become a favourite target for mockery and demonisation.

To many Russians, the Sochi criticism fits a recent pattern of western bias.

When Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich triggered a geopolitical tug of war by suddenly aborting an association agreement with the EU, Mr Putin was depicted as the puppet master.

In many European capitals, it was Moscow's meddling that was to blame, never mind that a politically fickle and economically unstable Ukraine was always going to be a difficult partner for the EU to deal with.

Yet when Moscow criticises western officials - Guido Westerwelle, then Germany's foreign minister; Catherine Ashton, the EU foreign policy chief; or Victoria Nuland, the US assistant secretary of state for basking in the crowd in Kiev and siding with the opposition as interference in Ukraine's internal affairs, its view is barely taken seriously.

There is no doubt that Russia is trying hard to retain its reduced regional sphere of influence left after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Mr Putin's grand scheme of a Eurasian union, an economic sphere reaching from Europe to the Pacific coast, is a clear attempt to build a framework that would once again hinge on Moscow.

But such a reaction from a country that has seen a constant erosion of its global power should not surprise anyone. Western countries and regional institutions including the EU and Nato have exacerbated the problem. Russia can be forgiven for feeling encircled by an expanded Nato and enlarged EU.

At the same time, Russia can hardly pin the blame for the hostile atmosphere on the EU and the US.

Since he returned to the presidency in 2012, if not before, Mr Putin has readily blamed the west for his country's ills, denouncing its decadent societies and vowing to defend Russia's traditional values.

Late last year, he twice invoked moral conservatism as a bulwark against corrosive western influences, turning it into a central feature of his presidential agenda.

Partly, this ideology has served to underpin domestic policy initiatives such as restricting the development of civil society and banning the promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors. But it has also created a fallout for international relations.

Steps such as a ban on adoptions of Russian children by American families and the requirement for Russian non-governmental groups funded from abroad to register as "foreign agents" have derailed President Barack Obama's "reset" of relations with Russia and poisoned ties to the extent that both sides say little is left but to work together on global conflicts.

As a result, the notion of an "evil empire", former US President Ronald Reagan's label for the Soviet Union, occasionally still appears to colour western perceptions of Moscow. As long as that does not change, Russia's relations with Europe and America are not normal at all.

Under those circumstances, a "normal" Olympics in Sochi will be a real achievement, and everyone should enjoy the party as long as it lasts.

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World Politics Review

www.worldpoliticsreview.com

February 7, 2014

EU-Russia Collision Not Inevitable in Post-Soviet Space

By Matthew Rojansky

Matthew Rojansky is director of the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center and an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins SAIS and American University. He is an expert on U.S. relations with the states of the former Soviet Union, especially Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, and a participant in the Dartmouth Dialogues, a track-two U.S.-Russian conflict resolution initiative begun in 1960.

Late last year, the European Union and the Russian Federation ushered in a new period of intense geopolitical rivalry, driven largely by pressure from the escalating disorder in Ukraine and the possible collapse of that country's government. Despite assurances by top leaders of continued dialogue, the rhetoric from politicians, the press and expert communities on both sides is now disturbingly reminiscent of rivalry from Europe's bloody past, including the run-up to World War I, exactly 100 years ago.

The root causes of Russia-West confrontation over the post-Soviet space have been consistent for the past two decades. First, there is not yet a clear consensus about who decides the future of the no longer "newly independent" states stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Caspian Basin. It may be rhetorically comfortable to suggest that the people themselves are the only legitimate arbiters of their fate, yet the current situation in Ukraine amply illustrates how quickly a domestic political fight turns geopolitical.

Second, even when the two sides come together to negotiate, they do so on the basis of fundamentally different political cultures, with often diametrically opposed domestic political constraints. The EU is at best a kind of referee and press office in the service of the larger member states and their middle-sized understudies. Nevertheless, small EU states can occasionally project an outsized role if they threaten to block the consensus on which all EU decision-making depends. All this makes for a highly disjointed approach to any negotiation. By comparison, Russian politics is straightforward and predictable: The president has the lion's share of authority over all matters and can mostly deliver on his promises. Yet in such a rigidly vertical system, there is also little room for the top leader to make concessions on the international stage, since he cannot afford even a fleeting appearance of weakness.

Finally, even when the domestic political stars align to bring Russian and European leaders together for productive negotiations, both sides discover how deeply rooted mutual distrust in the post-Soviet space itself can quickly undermine any agreement. While Russians and Germans have gradually forged a productive agenda of political, cultural and business ties despite the still painful collective memory of World War II, Russia's relations with Romanians, Balts and Galician Ukrainians, for example, are far from trusting. Until political leaders and societies commit to processes of comprehensive historical reconciliation, on the model of what Germany and France have done and what Russia and Poland recently started, there will be little hope for practical cooperation on current challenges.

Despite these considerable barriers, might Russia and the EU come together to explore a practical agenda for cooperation, or at least coexistence, in the post-Soviet space? Perhaps.

To start, both sides would have to be clear about their own most vital interests in the region, while recognizing the legitimacy of the other side's views. From Europe's perspective, that means not simply dismissing Russia's stated interests because they do not match those of the West. Nor can Europe maintain the specious position that the only legitimate representatives of regional states' interests are those who are already oriented to the West. Simply put, Europe cannot wish Russia into irrelevance in a geographic area that has historically been central to Russia's global role, its economic development and Russian national identity.

At the same time, Russia must abandon unrealistic expectations that it can "divide and conquer" in its dealings with the EU by prioritizing selective bilateral engagement with member states over EU-Russia dialogue. Russian President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged the importance and legitimacy of regional integration when promoting his own Eurasian project, so he should also recognize that despite its ponderous bureaucracy and imperfect politics, the EU continues to evolve into the primary voice of its member states on foreign policy.

With these principles as a foundation, Russia and the EU will readily find a list of common interests on which to build closer and more productive relations. Most urgently, neither side wants to see domestic political dysfunction, as in Ukraine, or protracted conflicts, as in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, spiral into wide-scale bloodshed or state failure. These and other regional tensions also risk causing interruptions in the European energy supply system, from which all sides stand to lose due to Europe and Russia's still considerable mutual energy dependence.

What would this look like in practice? Take Ukraine, for instance, where tensions between Russia and Europe over rival economic integration projects in the former Soviet space are at the heart of the current crisis. Russia fears that the movement of discounted European products eastward, facilitated by the proposed EU-Ukraine free trade agreement, could undo its own precarious economic recovery, while Europe lambasts Russia's trade practices as economic colonialism. For the moment, the choice for neighboring states appears to be zero-sum, but that could change if Brussels and Moscow could reach an accord on even basic interaction between their respective free trade areas. Distant as this prospect may seem, recall that Russia is now in the WTO, and both sides have agreed to begin "technical level consultations" on broadening free trade. Combined with the proposed trans-Atlantic free trade agreement currently being negotiated, that would mean more than a billion consumers and a majority of the world's developed economies sharing the benefits of faster growth and rising living standards. It is urgently important that the latest EU-Russia tensions not derail this progress.

One hundred years after Europe's march to senseless slaughter in World War I, the map of the continent looks dramatically different. But some things have not changed very much. If the region's major geopolitical actors allow underlying dysfunction, tension and distrust to persist in their interactions over the post-Soviet space, it is not impossible that once again a seemingly small spark could ignite a region-wide conflagration.

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Stratfor.com

February 11, 2014

New Dimensions of U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Russia

By George Friedman

The struggle for some of the most strategic territory in the world took an interesting twist this week.

Last week we discussed what appeared to be a significant shift in German national strategy in which Berlin seemed to declare a new doctrine of increased assertiveness in the world -- a shift that followed intense German interest in Ukraine. This week, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, in a now-famous cell phone conversation, declared her strong contempt for the European Union and its weakness and counseled the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine to proceed quickly and without the Europeans to piece together a specific opposition coalition before the Russians saw what was happening and took action.

This is a new twist not because it makes clear that the United States is not the only country intercepting phone calls, but because it puts U.S. policy in Ukraine in a new light and forces us to reconsider U.S. strategy toward Russia and Germany. Nuland's cell phone conversation is hardly definitive, but it is an additional indicator of American strategic thinking.

Recent U.S. Foreign Policy Shifts

U.S. foreign policy has evolved during the past few years. Previously, the United States was focused heavily on the Islamic world and, more important, tended to regard the use of force as an early option in the execution of U.S. policy rather than as a last resort. This was true not only in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in Africa and elsewhere. The strategy was successful when its goal was to destroy an enemy military force. It proved far more difficult to use in occupying countries and shaping their internal and foreign policies. Military force has intrinsic limits.

The alternative has been a shift to a balance-of-power strategy in which the United States relies on the natural schisms that exist in every region to block the emergence of regional hegemony and contain unrest and groups that could threaten U.S. interests. The best example of the old policy is Libya, where the United States directly intervened with air power and special operations forces on the ground to unseat Moammar Gadhafi. Western efforts to replace him with a regime favorable to the United States and its allies have not succeeded. The new strategy can be seen in Syria, where rather than directly intervening the United States has stood back and allowed the warring factions to expend their energy on each other, preventing either side from diverting resources to activities that might challenge U.S. interests.

Behind this is a schism in U.S. foreign policy that has more to do with motivation than actual action. On one side, there are those who consciously support the Syria model for the United States as not necessarily the best moral option but the only practical option there is. On the other, there are those who argue on behalf of moral interventions, as we saw in Libya, and removing tyrants as an end in itself. Given the outcome in Libya, this faction is on the defensive, as it must explain how an intervention will actually improve the moral situation. Given that this faction also tended to oppose Iraq, it must show how an intervention will not degenerate into Iraqi-type warfare. That is hard to do, so for all the rhetoric, the United States is by default falling into a balance-of-power model.

The Geopolitical Battle in Ukraine

Russia emerged as a problem for the United States after the Orange Revolution in 2004, when the United States, supporting anti-Russian factions in Ukraine, succeeded in crafting a relatively pro-Western, anti-Russian government. The Russians read this as U.S. intelligence operations designed to create an anti-Russian Ukraine that, as we have written, would directly challenge Russian strategic and economic interests. Moreover, Moscow saw the Orange Revolution (along with the Rose Revolution) as a dress rehearsal for something that could occur in Russia next. The Russian response was to use its own covert capabilities, in conjunction with economic pressure from natural gas cutoffs, to undermine Ukraine's government and to use its war with Georgia as a striking reminder of the resurrection of Russian military capabilities. These moves, plus disappointment with Western aid, allowed a more pro-Russian government to emerge in Kiev, reducing the Russians' fears and increasing their confidence. In time, Moscow became more effective and assertive in playing its cards right in the Middle East -- giving rise to the current situations in Syria and Iran and elsewhere.

Washington had two options. One was to allow the balance of power to assert itself, in this case relying on the Europeans to contain the Russians. The other was to continue to follow the balance of power model but at a notch higher than pure passivity. As Nuland's call shows, U.S. confidence in Europe's will for and interest in blocking the Russians was low; hence a purely passive model would not work. The next step was the lowest possible level of involvement to contain the Russians and counter their moves in the Middle East. This meant a very limited and not too covert support for anti-Russian, pro-European demonstrators -- the re-creation of a pro-Western, anti-Russian government in Ukraine. To a considerable degree, the U.S. talks with Iran also allow Washington to deny the Russians an Iranian card, although the Syrian theater still allows the Kremlin some room to maneuver.

The United States is not prepared to intervene in the former Soviet Union. Russia is not a global power, and its military has many weaknesses, but it is by far the strongest in the region and is able to project power in the former Soviet periphery, as the war with Georgia showed. At the moment, the U.S. military also has many weaknesses. Having fought for more than a decade in the core of the Islamic world, the U.S. military is highly focused on a way of war not relevant to the former Soviet Union, its alliance structure around the former Soviet Union is frayed and not supportive of war, and the inevitable post-war cutbacks that traditionally follow any war the United States fights are cutting into capabilities. A direct intervention, even were it contemplated (which it is not), is not an option. The only correlation of forces that matters is what exists at a given point in time in a given place. In that sense, the closer U.S. forces get to the Russian homeland, the greater the advantage the Russians have.

Instead, the United States did the same thing that it did prior to the Orange Revolution: back the type of intervention that both the human rights advocates and the balance-of-power advocates could support. Giving financial and psychological support to the demonstrators protesting Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject a closer relationship with Europe, and later protesting the government's attempt to suppress the demonstrations, preserved the possibility of regime change in Ukraine, with minimal exposure and risk to the United States.

Dissatisfaction with the German Approach

As we said last week, it appeared that it was the Germans who were particularly pressing the issue, and that they were the ones virtually controlling one of the leaders of the protests, Vitali Klitschko. The United States appeared to be taking a back seat to Germany. Indeed, Berlin's statements indicating that it is prepared to take a more assertive role in the world appeared to be a historic shift in German foreign policy.

The statements were even more notable since, over the years, Germany appeared to have been moving closer to Russia on economic and strategic issues. Neither country was comfortable with U.S. aggressiveness in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Both countries shared the need to create new economic relationships in the face of the European economic crisis and the need to contain the United States. Hence, the apparent German shift was startling.

Although Germany's move should not be dismissed, its meaning was not as clear as it seemed. In her cell phone call, Nuland is clearly dismissing the Germans, Klitschko and all their efforts in Ukraine. This could mean that the strategy was too feeble for American tastes (Berlin cannot, after all, risk too big a confrontation with Moscow). Or it could mean that when the Germans said they were planning to be more assertive, their new boldness was meant to head off U.S. efforts. Looking at this week's events, it is not clear what the Germans meant.

What is clear is that the United States was not satisfied with Germany and the European Union. Logically, this meant that the United States intended to be more aggressive than the Germans in supporting opponents of the regime. This is a touchy issue for human rights advocates, or should be. Yanukovich is the elected president of Ukraine, winner of an election that is generally agreed to

have been honest (even though his constitutional amendments and subsequent parliamentary elections may not have been). He was acting within his authority in rejecting the deal with the European Union. If demonstrators can unseat an elected president because they disagree with his actions, they have set a precedent that undermines constitutionalism. Even if he was rough in suppressing the demonstrators, it does not nullify his election.

>From a balance of power strategy, however, it makes great sense. A pro-Western, even ambiguous, Ukraine poses a profound strategic problem for Russia. It would be as if Texas became pro-Russian, and the Mississippi River system, oil production, the Midwest and the Southwest became vulnerable. The Russian ability to engage in Iran or Syria suddenly contracts. Moscow's focus must be on Ukraine.

Using the demonstrations to create a massive problem for Russia does two things. It creates a real strategic challenge for the Russians and forces them on the defensive. Second, it reminds Russia that Washington has capabilities and options that make challenging the United States difficult. And it can be framed in a way that human rights advocates will applaud in spite of the constitutional issues, enemies of the Iranian talks will appreciate and Central Europeans from Poland to Romania will see as a sign of U.S. commitment to the region. The United States will re-emerge as an alternative to Germany and Russia. It is a brilliant stroke.

Its one weakness, if we can call it that, is that it is hard to see how it can work. Russia has significant economic leverage in Ukraine, it is not clear that pro-Western demonstrators are in the majority, and Russian covert capabilities in Ukraine outstrip American capabilities. The Federal Security Service and Foreign Intelligence Service have been collecting files on Ukrainians for a long time. We would expect that after the Olympics in Sochi, the Russians could play their trump cards.

On the other hand, even if the play fails, the United States will have demonstrated that it is back in the game and that the Russians should look around their periphery and wonder where the United States will act next. Putting someone in a defensive crouch does not require that the first punch work. It is enough for the opponent to understand that the next punch will come when he is least expecting it. The mere willingness of the United States to engage will change the expectations of Central Europe, cause tensions between the Central Europeans and the Germans and create an opening for the United States.

The Pressure on Russia

Of course, the question is whether and where the Russians will answer the Americans, or even if they will consider the U.S. actions significant at all. In a sense, Syria was Moscow's move and this is the countermove. The Russians can choose to call the game. They have many reasons to. Their economy is under pressure. The Germans may not rally to the United States, but they will not break from it. And if the United States ups the ante in Central Europe, Russian inroads there will dissolve.

If the Russians are now an American problem, which they are, and if the United States is not going to revert to a direct intervention mode, which it cannot, then this strategy makes sense. At the very least it gives the Russians a problem and a sense of insecurity that can curb their actions elsewhere. At best it could create a regime that might not counterbalance Russia but could make pipelines and ports vulnerable -- especially with U.S. help.

The public interception of Nuland's phone call was not all that embarrassing. It showed the world that the United States, not Germany, is leading the way in Ukraine. And it showed the Russians that the Americans care so little, they will express it on an open cell phone line. Nuland's obscene dismissal of the European Union and treatment of Russia as a problem to deal with confirms a U.S. policy: The United States is not going to war, but passivity is over.

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The National Interest

<http://nationalinterest.org>

February 11, 2014

Obama's Liberal Imperialism

By David Rieff

David Rieff is the author of eight books, including *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (Simon & Schuster, 2003) and *At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention* (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

To accuse President Obama of being exceptional in his refusal to embrace American exceptionalism has been a perennial staple of discourse among hawkish conservatives intent on proving that he has a proclivity for going AWOL when it comes to national security. During the 2008 election campaign, Senator John McCain, for example, accused then candidate Obama of not believing in America's role as the world's leader and of not pushing back hard when confronted by those in other countries who doubted America's greatness. And Mitt Romney tried to play the same card in 2012: "Our president doesn't have the same feelings about American exceptionalism that we do. And I think over the last three or four years, some people around the world have begun to question that."

For those, like me, who would prefer our country to be more of a republic and less of an empire, and to eschew its historic global role of the "dangerous nation," to use the characterization coined by Robert Kagan, who meant it as praise, the most obvious response to these claims is a heartfelt: "If only!"

No matter what his neocon detractors may allege, it seems clear, on the basis of his conduct in office, that when Obama campaigned on the slogan, "Change You Can Believe In," he did not mean to mount a substantial challenge to what has been the fundamental assumption of American foreign policy since the end of the Second World War—that it is up to the U.S. to lead the world and that, in the end, whether Washington has proceeded unilaterally as it did in the George W. Bush years, or multilaterally, as the Democratic Party's foreign-policy establishment has prescribed, the America's view of what the global order needs to look like should be dispositive, to use a word that Vice President Biden is fond of deploying. Claims that President Obama brings shame on the United States by being too humble and too conciliatory when he goes abroad, or attempts to make heavy weather of his having supposedly bowed to the Saudi king during a visit to Riyadh, or shaking hands with Raul Castro at Mandela's funeral—a gesture Senator McCain likened to Chamberlain shaking hands with Hitler—will doubtless continue to circulate among certain branches of the GOP. They refuse to accept that America's greatness is not enhanced by constantly intervening abroad with military force. It is undermined.

What is remarkable about the Obama administration's foreign policy is how resistant it has been to this rather basic insight. The surprising thing is not how far the administration has strayed from neocon orthodoxy. Rather, it is the extent to which it resembles that of the Bush administration. The consanguinity, you could even say, between the neocons and liberal hawks has rarely been more apparent.

Indeed, in the case of drone strikes and the expansion of the powers of the intelligence agencies, a strong case can be made that President Obama's hawkishness is every bit the equal of his predecessor. American diplomats in the Obama era are no different from those who served presidents Clinton and Bush. As far as they are concerned, they are the masters of the universe (well, the earth anyway); in other words they have assumed without hesitation or reservation the default position of US diplomacy since the beginning of the Cold War.

Two recent episodes, minor in the broader scheme of things, and perhaps with a bit more low comedy than is usual, have been emblematic of this. The first was Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland (interestingly, she is married to Robert Kagan)

whose leaked phone conversation in which she while discussing with the US ambassador to Ukraine who should be installed in the place of the country's current president, Viktor Yanukovych, derided the European Union's less aggressive stance in supporting the opposition, and concluded "Fuck the EU." The second was the decision by Samantha Power, the US permanent representative to the United Nations, to receive two recently released members of the Russian dissident performance group, Pussy Riot, and, in turn, to use the occasion to denounce Russia's human-rights record.

Obviously, there are differences between the two events. Ambassador Power seems to have been looking for a platform to denounce the Russian government, and seems to have thought that, in doing so, she had done a good day's work in the service of her country. In contrast, Assistant Secretary Nuland imagined her conversation to be private, and when it came out, though she tried to laugh it off, she was apparently obliged to make a number of phone calls to her European counterparts to smooth things over. As the president of the European parliament, Martin Schulz, remarked "the term 'diplomat' and [Nuland's] choice of words actually stand in contradiction to each other."

Of course, what Schulz failed to take into account was that, although they never phrase it quite so bluntly (in public, anyway), American diplomats don't consider themselves diplomats in the usual sense, but rather as representatives of an empire. To quote a proverb from another empire, the Roman, "Quod licet jovi, non licet bovi," 'What is permitted to Jupiter is not permitted to an ox.' It is this self-image, and sense of infinite entitlement, that allowed American officials, including Nuland herself, to offer no public apology, instead denouncing the Russian officials who are presumed to have publicized the "Fuck the EU" remark on the Internet-this only a few weeks after President Obama, while stating that the US would no longer tap the phones of foreign leaders who are allies of the United States, refused to be drawn on whether there would be such continued surveillance of their subordinates.

In other words, for the US to defend its right to listen to everyone else's conversations is a key matter of national interest, but for our adversaries to do the same, and, worse, leak what they've recorded to the public-why that, as the State Department's spokeswoman, Jen Paski, put it, "is a new low in Russian tradecraft." Be careful out there, because here come Jupiter and that ox again!

Lest it be forgotten, Nuland, is not any American diplomat but rather the Assistant Secretary of State-might I note-for Europe. That even in an unguarded moment she could feel free to speak this way is not so much reminiscent of a senior foreign-service officer whose main task, Ukraine or no Ukraine, is to keep relations between the US and the EU on an even keel, but rather of a British resident agent in one of the princely states of India during the Raj. These representatives of empire must have felt the same sort of exasperation. Ah well, such are the frustrations of indirect rule, whether in Baroda or Hyderabad in 1889 or in Brussels today.

At least the British resident agent could depose a recalcitrant maharaja if the interests of the Raj required it. Poor secretary Nuland: for a moment one almost feels sorry for her, as she-can there be another word for it?-conspired with the US ambassador to Kiev to overthrow the current president of Ukraine, only to have not only her opinions about the EU but which opposition leader Washington wishes to install in his place, posted on YouTube. "Fu-k the EU," yes, but "Fu-k the Russians" too for making regime change so bloody difficult.

It was a week in which antagonizing Russia almost seemed to have become an Obama administration talking point. Power kept her language clean, of course, but her message was not all that different from Nuland's. According to Power's spokesman, the ambassador and the two women discussed "the disturbing trend in (Russia) of legislation, prosecutions and government actions aimed at suppressing dissent and pressuring groups that advocate for fundamental human rights and basic government accountability." And in response to Russian permanent representative Vitaly Churkin's jibe that she should join the band herself, Power replied, "I can't sing, but if Pussy Riot will have me...I say our first concert is for Russia's political prisoners."

Even leaving aside the fact that the two members of Pussy Riot whom Ambassador Power feted at the UN have been attacked by their colleagues as sell-outs who betrayed the ethical principles the group has stood for (and went to jail for), it is anything but clear why Power felt the need to goad the Russians in this way and how it could possibly further her work as US permanent representative-a diplomatic post that at least traditionally calls for, well, diplomacy, not confrontational showboating. Supporters of Power's gesture would probably argue that she was only following in the truth-telling footsteps of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Jeane Kirkpatrick, the predecessors in her job to whom she paid tribute during her Senate confirmation hearing. But whatever one thinks of the job they did, Moynihan and Kirkpatrick picked their shots: when they confronted their Russian opposite numbers it was not only on far weightier matters than the imprisonment of a rock band for staging a political demonstration in Moscow's biggest Orthodox cathedral. At the very least, one might have thought, given Power's passionate feelings on the Syrian civil war, whose resolution is inconceivable without a deal with Russia, much of which will need to be hammered out at the UN, that this was hardly the time to further fray relations between Washington and Moscow by what, when all was said and done, was unnecessary grandstanding on Power's part.

Since the 1990s, the cliché in Washington has been that the bipartisan consensus over foreign policy that was the rule throughout the Cold War has been shattered in its aftermath, much to everyone's detriment. And on a rhetorical level this is true to some extent. But in terms of differences over the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, the reality is one of far more continuity than rupture. And if national-greatness conservatives such as Robert Kagan and liberal hawks like Samantha Power choose to emphasize what divides rather than what unites them, this is more of family quarrel than anything else, and not much of one at that.

In fact, Victoria Nuland's career illustrates this perfectly. She was Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott's chief of staff during the Clinton administration, principal deputy foreign-policy advisor to Vice President Cheney and then ambassador to NATO under George W. Bush, and first State Department spokesperson and then Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs under Barack Obama. Revolving doors don't get much more revolving than that, nor foreign-policy continuity more, well, continuous.

Are we all liberal imperialists now? Excluding the political bundlers and fundraisers that presidents reward with embassies in countries they know little or nothing about (the Obama administration's nomination of Noah Mamet to be ambassador to Argentina being a grotesque example of this impulse), if you work on foreign policy for the US government, the answer would seem to be an emphatic yes.

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#42

Business New Europe

www.bne.eu

February 11, 2014

Interview with a titushki

Harriet Salem and Graham Stack in Kyiv

Ukraine's ruling Party of Regions is controversially deploying hired muscle to back up police units against opposition protestors. Nicknamed "titushki", the activity of the hired hands is undermining the government's already precarious legitimacy. bne spoke to a member of the titushki.

There is nothing new about the paid employment of heavies from Ukraine's sprawling combat sport scene outside the ring. In the chaotic 1990s, the term "sportsman" was synonymous with gangsterism. In the next decade, as bandits ceded the stage to oligarchs, business drew on heavies when implementing hostile corporate takeovers - enforcing a crooked court decision to seize control of a contested plant, for instance. Currently, many sportsmen find work as uniformed guards in

security companies. In contrast to ex-police, "sportsmen" do not need firearms to intimidate.

But only in 2013 did these sportsmen begin to play a notable role in politics - spawning the now notorious titushki. Last year, the pro-government Party of Regions found itself faced by increasingly militant opponents, especially from the nationalist party Svoboda, who frequently clashed with their ideological foes. In response, the Party of Regions activated networks of sportsmen as guards for their own demonstrations, which often consisted of paid supporters bussed in from East Ukraine.

The now-ubiquitous term titushki was coined in May of last year by journalists when one of their own fell victim to the phenomenon. During clashes between Party of Regions supporters with nationalists at a demonstration, one "sportsman" guarding the Party of Regions march, 18-year-old Vadim Titushko, a member of a combat sports club in a small town near Kyiv, beat up a female journalist filming him. Pictured alongside him during the attack was the head of the Party of Regions youth cell for that town.

Subsequently, the term titushki has even made its international debut. Attending the 2014 Munich Security conference at the end of January, Ukraine opposition leader Vitaly Klitschko wrote on Facebook that: "Today bandits are out on the streets, beating, kidnapping, arresting peaceful citizens... and burning their cars. I have seen who were dealing with - I have regularly participated in defending Kyiv streets against titushki often protected by the police."

People's patrols

Titushki became a part of the political vocabulary when opposition to President Viktor Yanukovich's domestic and foreign policies metamorphosed into full-blooded mass protest in late November, triggering a government crackdown that continues to today. Ukraine's opposition media was rife with reports of titushki roaming the winter darkness - with regular attacks on demonstrators by masked men justifying the fears.

When opposition activists upped the ante mid-January, throwing petrol bombs in Kyiv and seizing regional state offices, Party of Regions officials went into titushki overdrive as they organised the defence of regional administration buildings across the country: numerous video clips show police mingling with masked civilians armed with clubs and bats in a standoff against demonstrators.

Authorities even acknowledge such collaboration between titushki and police. Kharkiv's hard line authorities announced February 4 the founding of a "national guard" in collaboration with local sports clubs. Dmitro Kolesnikov, head of Dnipropetrovsk region where apparent titushki with baseball bats were filmed alongside police inside the regional administration headquarters, claimed to journalists that, "social organisations have organised themselves into people's patrols, they are registered and entirely legal." Kolesnikov went on to explain that, "law-enforcement organs had no alternative."

A quick check of the state register shows that such a "people's patrol" is indeed registered in Dnipropetrovsk - but only as of January 30, the eve of the clashes, and listed at the address of the regional administration itself.

Meet the titushki

bne met with a titushki called Misha from Kharkiv. The 28-year-old Misha is currently deployed in Kyiv guarding the Marinsky Park, where pro-Party of Regions demonstrations are held. Misha has two gold teeth as a result of a boxing career, and the number 13 tattooed on his neck in connection with an unhappy childhood, he explains. Misha tells bne he is a champion welterweight boxer who works as security guard. But he assures us that he is here as a volunteer out of conviction, not for money. Fifteen others from his boxing club obviously share his convictions since they have come too, he says.

Misha insists that he is only there to guard peaceful citizens, to maintain public order and to protect the monuments - the latter a reference to nationalists' controversial toppling of a statue of Vladimir Lenin in December in central Kyiv. Other titushki encountered in Marinsky Park echo the same sentiments, raising the suspicion they had been prepped by the party.

Misha acknowledges that the pro-government Party of Regions camp in Marinsky Park adjacent to Ukraine's parliament, the Rada, had attracted undesirable elements who drank and were aggressive, but says his group got rid of them. According to Misha, titushki are misunderstood and oppressed by the anti-government Euromaidan activists. "Twenty of them cornered two of us - what could they do against those odds?" he complains about a recent clash with the other side.

Misha denies he would attack peaceful demonstrators, only defend against "extremists". But his eyes light up at mention of Evhen Zhilin, the prominent owner of a Kharkiv fight club called Oplot, who has declared open season on anti-government protestors and claims to have organised forays to Kyiv to attack opposition "extremists". "Those guys are my friends," Misha says. "[Zhilin's] Oplot is a real fight club like in the movie - fighters bandage their hands but nothing more. Blood can flow."

In a controversial interview given by the fight club owner on February 3, Zhilin said that his fighters were entitled by law to attack anti-government protestors who seized state buildings, and to inflict light to medium injuries in the course of "arresting criminals". "I want criminals to know that I can break one leg completely and incur no criminal responsibility doing so," he warned in the interview.

Zhilin also claims that he can call on 350 fighters in Kharkiv and 2,000 across all Ukraine. "We sportsmen are a real community, in Ukraine and in Russia," Misha explains. "We hang together and can all rely on each other. Anywhere I go I can find other sportsmen and I know I can rely on them."

Misha hesitates when asked about Ukraine's most famous sportsmen, however, boxing world champion Vitaly Klitschko - one of the leaders of the opposition who is tipped to replace Yanukovich as president. Klitschko was himself acquainted with this sportsmen scene in his early career in Kyiv in the 1990s. "I respect Klitschko as a fighter, and I respect his right to his own opinion. But I have a different opinion from him," Misha says.

Misha says he is angry about the opposition's answer to the titushki: mobilisation of the hooligan sections of Ukraine's football clubs. At recent anti-government Euromaidan Sunday rallies, opposition leaders reeled off lists of football clubs whose hooligans have declared war on the titushki. "These guys are crazy and the main thing is they cannot fight without weapons," Misha tells bne disparagingly.

"I am here because of my convictions," Misha repeats. But what those convictions are is hard to pinpoint. Misha seems oriented towards big people, state power and Russia, where his family come from. He relates with pride his career-high to date: how as a security guard at Europe's biggest summer dance festival, Kazantip in Ukraine's Crimea, he escorted one of Russia's richest men, oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, who had come to groove to the electronic beats.

The only sign of Misha having strong convictions is when we prepare to leave and bne dons a fake Nike hat acquired on an outdoor market. Misha dons an Adidas hat and jacket - to complement the trousers and shoes that all bear the recognisable three white stripes. "Adidas is better," he says, his gold teeth glinting in a rare smile.

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#43

Euromaidan PR

<http://euromaidanpr.wordpress.com>

February 10, 2014

The Hijacking of a Nation

By Alex Stepchuk

[Euromaidan in English - Site of the Official English-language Public Relations Secretariat for the Headquarters of the National Resistance in Kyiv, Ukraine]

The 2001 Ukrainian Population Census indicated that Ukraine is home to representatives of almost 130 nationalities. It is comprised of approximately 77% ethnic Ukrainians, 17% ethnic Russians and the remaining 6% in decreasing order of their numbers by Belarusians, Crimean Tatars, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Jews etc.

In the households categorized as of ethnic Russian descent, many of them are now into their second and third generation as Ukrainian "natives". Today, many of those are proud Ukrainians. You see them on the streets of Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Dnipropetrovsk and throughout Ukraine, protesting in support of the Maidan while risking harsh retributions for their stance. These ethnic Russians have shown that although they may celebrate their heritage as Russians, they have become a part of Ukrainian society. This is much like the children and grandchildren of a variety of Diasporas around the world. They are Canadians, Americans and Europeans, but they still have strong connections to the heritage of their forefathers.

It is not an issue that the minority of the population which is ethnic Russian prefers to use their ancestral language. Or even that they still harbor allegiances to their family legacies. It is more that although they are only a small percent of the nation's population, they hold a disproportionately high rate of positions of power throughout the country. And, of those of which are charting the direction of the nation's future, they are the even smaller minority of that 17%, who have shown a preference to the post-Soviet social order rather than that of the modern Ukrainian society. A country can not have a democratic future when it does not have a government representative of its people. One of the authors of America's Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson said, "That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part."

In today's Ukraine, the majority of the population does not feel a part of their government. That is why most of the recent polling data shows that any of the opposition leaders could beat Yanukovych in a free & fair election. That is why for months now, in cities across Ukraine, millions have taken to their streets in protests demanding a government for the many and not one that serves only the privileged few.

It is not xenophobia, the fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners, that brings up the pro Russian question. It is the fear that a sliver of the ethnic Russian population, who although they choose to live in Ukraine, refuse to become Ukrainian. It is the hatred that they would rather strong arm the nation in direction it has no desire to go, than become part of the nation and help it flourish. It the sadness that they insist on being strangers and foreigners in the place they call home. They are a small, tightly woven, corrupt, pro-Russian gang which is hijacking the future of Ukraine.

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The Voice of Russia

<http://voiceofrussia.com>

February 11, 2014

Ukrainian "Corridor of Death" or how extremists in Kiev mocked Berkut

At first glance it may seem that disturbances in Kiev came to an end. However, only during the last day in the center of Ukrainian capital the police have registered another three cases of robbery and severe beatings by the radical activists. Provocateurs are craving for blood and this marks the continuation of the bloodshed on the Independence Square. "Voice of Russia" was able to talk to several Berkut fighters who spoke about how they were mocked.

They have been in the center of the events and could tell without adjustments about the cruelty and violence at the Independence Square. With masks covering their faces, they were beaten and abused. Here is what one of the fighters have shared:

"Yes, we were beaten by these masked thugs. They grabbed us by the arms and started screaming that these are the cops, terrorists. They led us to the Kiev city administration. They forced me to smoke in a gas mask, they cut my ear. Then they took us to the basement, they stripped us out of clothes and they cut them. They spilled us with water and beat us at the same time.

We caught you, "musorok"? (which is a rude way of calling the police officer)"

His friend added:

"I was taken to the medical center, which they have built on the second floor. And two my friends were pulled into the cellar for interrogation."

Gestapo might have been envious by the Ukrainian extremists techniques. Third participator of the talks said that several people could attack one person and start beating him. It was a real corridor of death:

"When they were dragged me there, they were beating me all the time. This is a corridor of death. I was dragged by 10 people. And it seems that there were a lot of people around us, since there were a lot of punches. I actually could not lift my head, first they kept me, then they pulled me, then they picked me up and I was going. A couple of times I tried to resist. They were all masked. I do not know who was the head of them; they were just a group of bandits."

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Anti-Semitism surging in Ukraine - Israeli diplomat

MOSCOW. Feb 11 (Interfax) - A senior Israeli diplomat has complained about an alleged upsurge of anti-Semitism in Ukraine.

"In the last few years - I mean before this crisis - there was a decline in anti-Semitic sentiments in Ukraine. Now, of course, with the situation being as heated as it is, everything is bubbling over there," Anna Azari, Foreign Ministry deputy general director for Eurasia, told Interfax.

"Unfortunately, as it seems to me, both sides are using the anti-Semitism theme as an instrument of some kind. In other words, each side wants to accused the other of anti-Semitism and earn political points thereby," she said.

"We are trying, on the one hand, to follow what is happening to the Jewish community, and, on the other, not to get duped in a situation where everyone is trying to fish something out of troubled waters," Azari.

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#46

Eurasianet.org

February 10, 2014

Looking at Euromaidan's Support in Eastern Ukraine

By Jonathan Alpeyrie and Dorothee Moisan

The Euromaidan movement is centered in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, but its eventual success or failure could be determined in cities like Kharkiv or Dnepropetrovsk.

Euromaidan supporters are trying to force the resignation of President Viktor Yanukovich and broaden economic opportunities for citizens. They also would like to see Ukraine orient itself more toward the West, namely the European Union. Yanukovich's administration is steering the country back into Russia's close embrace.

A political stalemate has settled over Kyiv, which has been gripped by protests for almost three months. Neither side at present seems to have the strength to score a decisive blow against the other. American and EU diplomats, meanwhile, are struggling to develop an aid package that could sway political debates in Kyiv. Political observers are also keeping an eye on Russia, which, after the Olympic spectacle wraps up, is widely expected to make a power play in Ukraine.

Ultimately, Yanukovich's fate may depend on how well he can defend his political heartland - the mainly Russian-speaking cities of eastern Ukraine, especially the industrial centers of Kharkiv and Dnepropetrovsk. Small cracks have appeared in the president's base; tiny protests are occurring in Kharkiv and Dnepropetrovsk, despite a heavy-handed response by local authorities. If the Euromaidan movement can make significant inroads into eastern Ukraine, Yanukovich could quickly find himself in an untenable position.

In Kharkiv, Euromaidan supporters like to gather in front of a monument to Ukrainian literary hero Taras Shevchenko. One day recently, a relatively small group of protesters showed up in minus-20 (Celsius) weather. "Glory to Ukraine!" one shouted. "East and West together!"

Such zeal is more the exception rather than the rule in Kharkiv these days. Most residents simply appear to be trying to maintain their normal routines. When asked about the political situation in Ukraine, smiles are apt to quickly disappear from their faces. It's hard to get a good read on the public mood because many believe that speaking out, especially in favor of Euromaidan, carries a risk of retribution.

In trying to counter the Euromaidan movement, officials have not only relied on security forces, they have deployed goon squads. Dubbed titushki by some Ukrainian media outlets, these mercenary thugs are often used to sow mayhem among protesters. They are also suspected of being involved in a variety of dirty deeds, such as the late December stabbing of 32-year-old Dmytro Pylypets. He reported that two strangers approached him as he was walking home in Kharkiv one evening and stabbed him four times.

A journalist in Kharkiv, speaking on condition of anonymity, said pro-presidential forces were trying to keep a tight lid on the flow of information. "I can come each day and cover the demonstrations against Yanukovich, [but] my newspaper will never publish a single line about them," the journalist said. "In the past, we had 10 TV stations and six newspapers; today it's three times less, and they're detained by allies of the regime."

If the Euromaidan movement is going to gain traction in Kharkiv and elsewhere in eastern Ukraine, it will have to win over people like Alena Pidgorna, a 20-year-old university student. Pidgorna and her friends prefer to gather these days at a place called the Doma Café, which they see as a refuge from the political debates swirling about them. Political discussions are informally banned within the café's confines.

Pidgorna expressed dislike for Yanukovich, but stressed that the Euromaidan movement was addressing problems in an improper way. "They want to impose their views," she said, referring to Euromaidan supporters. "Here, we think it's better to work and feed family. We feel angry, because they occupied some public buildings. We want change, but not war."

She added that the Euromaidan movement hadn't mounted a convincing argument to her, or her friends, that it represented a genuine alternative. "If he [Yanukovich] leaves, we don't have any other candidate who is not corrupted," she said. In her mind Euromaidan is associated mostly with

inconvenience; last month her stipend arrived two weeks late because of the upheaval in Kyiv.

Editor's Note: Jonathan Alpeyrie is a freelance photojournalist based in New York.

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#47

Council on Foreign Relations

www.cfr.org

February 10, 2014

Five Financial Questions for Ukraine

By Robert Kahn

Steven A. Tananbaum Senior Fellow for International Economics

There is an interesting debate going on in Western capitals over financial support for Ukraine. The possibility of political change, coupled with Russia's decision to suspend disbursements on its \$12 billion financial package, has created an opening for meaningful economic reforms and renewed ties with global financial bodies. There are compelling political arguments for the West to respond with a financing program that makes it economically viable for Ukraine to choose the EU Association Agreement that it rejected last year. But the economics make a deal hard to put together. For now, the ball is in Ukraine's court—tensions remain high and Western aid will require at a minimum a technocratic and reform oriented government be put in place. But should that happen, here are five economic questions on the table.

1. How big is the hole? Ukraine has significant fiscal and external imbalances. For some time, and against the advice of the IMF, the government had tried to peg the exchange rate at just over 8 hryvnia against the dollar. Last week, with foreign exchange reserves plunging to around \$17 billion (around 2 months of pre-crisis imports) and reports of significant deposit flight, the government abandoned the peg, imposed capital controls, and is now managing the exchange rate down. That is good for long-run competitiveness, but doesn't preclude the need for substantial upfront financing. In December, the IMF identified a current account deficit of over 8 percent of GDP and a fiscal deficit of 7 ¾ percent of GDP. The underlying fundamentals look to have deteriorated since then. Optimists will argue that market access would return quickly with improved policies, but there would be significant risks to any lightly funded program. A financing gap on the order of \$15 billion seems reasonable.

2. Who pays? Western officials are understandably hesitant to be caught up in a bidding war with the Russians over aid, but discussions look underway to try and boost the package on offer to Ukraine. Until now, the reported European package is quite small, less than \$1 billion. The EBRD should expand lending, but their exposure to Ukraine is already stretched. Some creativity may be possible using structures that encourage private sector cofinancing. One idea would be to expand the IFC's A-B loan program, which provides a degree of seniority to cofinancing partners. In addition, the IFC's focus on trade and energy efficiency—critical issues given strained relations with Russia—should easily be scalable. The US government should ask Congress to reprogram available funds (perhaps the "Chobani affair" at the Olympics makes that possible!). An IMF program is a must, but will it be a large access program that could be needed to fill the financing gap? That would be a tough call for the IMF, which in their last review criticized the government's past ownership of the reform program and argued that "arrangements with lower access focused on critical areas may have better prospects."

3. Russia's role? The financing need will depend on how Russia reacts, both in terms of trade sanctions and energy pricing (Russia is the dominant supplier of energy to Ukraine). To the extent that market access gains can be accelerated when the EU Association Agreement is signed, they should be. And Russia is in principle constrained from retaliation by its WTO obligations (the US and Europe should take a strong, united stand on this point). In the end, some understanding with

the Russians seems required.

4. A sustainable reduction in subsidies? The IMF rightly has taken a strong stance on the need for a substantial increase in energy prices, on the order of 40 percent, but how fast does that have to happen? In my view, the increase could be done gradually, as long as there is "stickiness" in that the increases are not reversed. It would help a lot if future increases had automaticity (e.g., indexed), a narrow safety net was constructed to protect the poor, and the policy had popular support. That's a tough job, but worth the effort. Of course, a gradual adjustment requires more financing in the near term.

5. Burden sharing? The toughest question, and most important for markets, is whether economic assistance will be conditioned on a private sector involvement (PSI). There is a hot debate now underway about whether the rules of the game for debt restructuring need to change, in cases where debt sustainability is uncertain. Ukraine's government debt is not high by international standards—on the order of 45 percent of GDP. Instead, the case for a reprofiling of debt here rests on the old-fashioned need for financing. If there is a residual gap, will the Europeans up their contribution so external creditors can get paid? Should they? If, as noted above, there are good reasons for the IMF to limit its role, attention may turn to the debt. Over the next two years, Ukraine has around \$2.1 billion in external bonds falling due, including \$1 billion in June 2014. It might be attractive to push off payments, but care will need to be given to the precedents that could be set and to managing the risks of contagion. Tim Ash has a good analysis as to why the risk of default may be underestimated. Reprofitting that debt—perhaps with a menu of options including new money from "friends of Ukraine"—backed by meaningful reform would send a powerful message and could draw broad popular support.

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#48

The Voice of Russia

<http://voiceofrussia.com>

February 11, 2014

Yatsenyuk: nice chap for the US

By Maria Balyabina

Leader of Ukraine's Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) party Arseniy Yatsenyuk has rather unexpectedly emerged as one of the likeliest candidates for prime minister, though he may not be as popular as his charismatic opposition partner, Vitali Klitchko. Both President Viktor Yanukovich and Western leaders have nodded their approval. However, when offered to fill the prime minister's seat, Yatsenyuk first took his time and then set forward his terms, namely that the government he would lead be formed entirely by the opposition.

Seven years ago, Yatsenyuk, a modest-looking young politician, said that he was quite pleased with his career as a public servant and had no premiership ambitions. Pretty soon, however, his ambitions changed. In 2009, Yatsenyuk created his own political party, Front for Change, and later entered the presidential race, signaling that he had done it not for pleasure but he was determined to win. He came in fourth with less than seven percent of the vote and was offered premiership, but rejected it and went into opposition. In 2012, Yatsenyuk's Front for Change allied with the Batkivshchyna opposition coalition led by Yulia Tymoshenko. After Tymoshenko's arrest, Yatsenyuk virtually replaced her as Batkivshchyna head.

"In the past few years, Yatsenyuk emerged not only as Tymoshenko's replacement but also as a man who has his own ambitions. For the Party of Regions, Yatsenyuk is a lesser evil. Not for anything would they have offered premiership to Yulia Tymoshenko. For Western partners, he is easy to understand. He speaks English quite well and is ready to repeat and properly articulate all of those Western mantras, giving the impression of being sincere," said political analyst Alexander

Fomenko.

The West apparently trusts Yatsenyuk. Last week's leaked recording of a telephone conversation between US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt suggests that Washington is indeed staking on the Batkivshchyna leader. As it seeks to install a puppet government in Ukraine, the United States is trying to sideline less experienced Klitschko, the EU's favorite. Experience may prove decisive, after all, said Alexander Gusev, Director of the Institute for Strategic Planning.

"Whatever they say about Yatsenyuk, he's got public service experience. He was foreign minister, National Bank chairman, and so on. Klitschko has none. He is a sportsman-turned-politician. Yatsenyuk appears to be on good terms both with oligarchs and the political establishment. He has more political clout and more opportunities. Don't forget that he replaced Tymoshenko, who had ties with a large pool of Ukrainian oligarchs," Gusev said.

One of possible scenarios that may be acted out in Ukraine is Yatsenyuk as prime minister and actual ruler and Klitschko as a nominal president. If the former Constitution is reinstated, albeit slightly amended, the presidential powers will be significantly restricted. That may equally work for the US and the EU.

Some analysts fear Yatsenyuk's appointment might be perceived as diktat forced upon Washington and as a threat to Ukraine's independence. Yatsenyuk's contacts with the West are no news to anyone.

"Everyone knows that he has good contacts with the West, above all, the Americans, and that they are staking on him. For them, he is a suitable choice, a nice chap. Yet, it's unlikely that this scandal will ruin his chances of becoming prime minister, though it may certainly work against him if he runs for the presidency. But not in this situation. On the contrary, his chances may increase. People will say look, here is one who can strike a deal with the US," said Valery Solovyov, a history professor at the Moscow Institute of International Relations (MGIMO).

Things are looking hot for Yatsenyuk after Tymoshenko's aired her latest demands. If he fails to fulfill them, he risks being ousted as Batkivshchyna leader. On the other hand, if he refuses to enter talks with the government, he risks angering the West and losing premiership.

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#49

Moscow Times

February 10, 2014

Separatist Games for U.K. and Russia

By Des Brown

The Economist's Feb. 1 issue led with President Putin and the Winter Olympics as its cover story, saying that "the message of the Games is simple: Russia is back."

Western commentators never fail to mention that the Winter Olympics are a showcase for Putin's modern Russia, while highlighting Sochi's location in the war-torn and separatist North Caucasus. The more modest Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, to be held in July and August, also finds itself linked to a wider political debate and separatist movement: It will be staged less than two months before the Sept. 18 referendum that will ask the question whether Scotland wishes to remain part of the United Kingdom or become an independent nation.

Additionally, both sporting events will be used as examples of "national resurgence," eradicating memories of the last time the Olympics were staged in Russia (1980) and the Commonwealth Games in Scotland (1986), when both were diminished by mass boycotts of competing nations. In

Russia's case, the boycott was due to their invasion of Afghanistan, while the Commonwealth Games were boycotted by 32 nations due to their opposition to apartheid in sports.

The 20th Commonwealth Games will arrive in the wake of a hugely successful London 2012 Olympic Games. It can be said the London Olympics came to fruition in the right city in the right month of the right year, and the same may be true of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games - it will be happening within weeks of the Ryder Cup and the independence referendum. This prompted Lonely Planet's 2014 "Guide to the Top 10 Countries" to list Scotland 3rd, behind Antarctica and Brazil.

Glasgow will do its utmost to live up to the cliché of the "Friendly Games" over the 11 days of competition from July 23 to Aug. 3, welcoming 70 countries from the Commonwealth to compete in 17 sports. There is yet no official number on the athletes participating, but the numbers are likely to match the 6,000 athletes who competed at the last Games in New Delhi in 2010.

Glasgow's budget is a modest £523.6 million (\$859.2 million). Sochi is somewhat different. Hosting 2,900 athletes from 85 nations competing in 15 disciplines, the \$51 billion spent on the Sochi Olympics makes it the most expensive sporting event in history. Yet the success of both events can only be judged in terms of ticket sales, television audiences and a final medal tally for the host nation.

The temporary euphoria generated by these sporting blockbusters will soon evaporate. Come summer, Putin may find little afterglow as the Sochi Games become a memory, just as Scotland's SNP First Minister Alex Salmond may find the Commonwealth Games will have little impact on his party's chances of winning a "Yes" vote in the referendum - all polls still show the "No" campaign ahead, though the lead is gradually narrowing.

The closing ceremonies will not be the end of the story though, as both Britain and Russia will be turning their attention to hosting World Cups: the Rugby World Cup in England during 2015 and the FIFA World Cup in Russia three years later.

In 2015, there will be both a General Election and a World Cup in Britain during the same year for the first time since 1966. This time, the World Cup is rugby rather than football. The 8th Rugby World Cup will kick off at Twickenham, the London home of the England team, on Sept. 18, and England will welcome 20 rugby-playing nations.

British Labour leader Ed Miliband can crack a smile because in the March 1966 election, Labour leader Harold Wilson was returned with a 96-seat majority. England, famously, also lifted the Jules Remy trophy at Wembley on July 30. So England and Labour supporters will also be hoping that history repeats itself next year.

In 2018, there will also be a presidential election in Russia at which Putin may or may not decide to seek a fourth term. Either Putin or a new president will then, in June and July, welcome 32 teams to play in the 21st FIFA World Cup across 11 cities including Moscow, St. Petersburg and Sochi.

The official website is already counting down the days to go. In terms of attendance and television audiences, the event is surpassed only by the Olympics and FIFA World Cup.

At the 2007 World Cup in France, 2.2 million people attended matches, whilst in the far smaller country of New Zealand in 2011, 1.4 million attended the 48 matches. Britain, with a larger population, is likely to see host venues like Twickenham, Wembley Stadium and the Olympic Stadium sold-out throughout the tournament.

Hold your breath, Britain and Russia: Despite the politics and the cost to beleaguered taxpayers, it is an exhilarating time for both nations, in the sports stadium and the political arena.

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#50

Russia Beyond the Headlines

www.rbth.ru

February 10, 2014

Black Volgas and the NSA

Thank you, Edward Snowden, for telling us how badly reform is needed. It would have been impossible without the knowledge you gave us.

George Feifer, special to RBTH

George Feifer is the author of many acclaimed books, including "Moscow Farewell" and "The Girl from Petrovka."

If Edward Snowden ever returns to America, he should be sentenced to two months' probation for revealing intelligence sources and violating other laws - and awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian citation. He deserves that honor because the other freedoms are too easily quashed without freedom of speech. However, the blessings of free speech are drastically diminished when the vast majority has no idea what it's talking about. How can they know about zealously guarded secrets?

A relative handful of officials claim they're keeping Americans ignorant about vital matters for the sake of the imperiled country. However, there's much reason to suspect they're as wrong about that as were the previous American president and his advisors who, operating similarly, plunged us into our disastrous war in Iraq. Snowden's concerns about the National Security Agency's ever-expanding exertions recall those of John Adams about never trusting power without checks. The jaws of power, cautioned the Founding Father and successor to George Washington, "are always open to devour. Her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing."

That warning is timelier than ever.

Of course the United States is far from alone in demonstrating the damage of unchecked power. You needn't remember much history to know how often it has produced catastrophe.

I lived in Moscow as an exchange student and journalist during some of the tensest Cold War years. A sullen man driven around in a black Volga was the bane of most of them. Maybe the bully had helped keep watch on me before I complained to the editor-in-chief of "Molodoi Kommunist" - the journal Young Communist - that an article he'd published about me was full of baloney, to use the gentlest possible word about its innuendo and lies about my supposedly anti-Soviet activities. (It was also stupid inasmuch as I wrote more positively about Russia and Russians than the proverbial 99 percent of Americans then.) The editor invited me to talk it over at lunch with his staff, and not to give anything away about KGB methods, my tormentor posed as one of them. It was only after he'd begun his awkward attempts to recruit me that I realized what his real work was. By that time, we were meeting alone, often in a private room of the Aragvi restaurant, where it was common knowledge that our conversations were being recorded.

During one of them, he scoffed at my insistence that no Washington agency could know about my last trip to Moscow because I'd flown in from London and mentioned it to no one. "Impossible," he scoffed. "Don't be so American naïve."

I assured myself that if I was naïve, he was hopelessly indoctrinated. Or stuck in the widespread Russian belief that all governments acted as badly as theirs, with its suspicions and open or hidden surveillance. Now I'm not so sure about what Washington did or didn't know. Nor whether it isn't paranoid.

Much later, a free-spirited Moscow artist and I were trying to imagine what people 50 years hence

would know about us that we'd never learn. "I'll bet the better histories being written then will reveal lots of government dirty tricks we never heard of," my friend suggested in his studio-cum-nightclub. "Not only for the continued spying on us but also much more invasive kinds on your noble citizens than our shepherds with their inferior equipment will maintain on ours. Naturally, it will be in the name of America's national security. People turned on by power don't trust other people to applaud them for having it."

I asked who'd said that.

"John Adams? Anyway, one of your presidents." He added that power liked to think it had a soul.

That conversation took place 20 years ago, shortly after the Soviet collapse. Now I'm more than ever sure about the wisdom of his political instincts and ever less so about whether The Land of the Free still deserves that name.

I hope no one imagines I'm trying to equate the U.S. with the Soviet Union. What I am suggesting is that our government's increasingly intense surveillance and justification for it more and more resemble practices of the U.S.S.R. about which we cried to the skies during its last decades. Yes the United States has enemies. Yes they're dangerous - but less so than the U.S. government's newfound passion for control and lying.

We're losing other ways too - losing very heavily. Remember when a good share of western progressives and intellectuals saw the Soviet Union as the hope for the future? The crash of the more venerable view of the United States as a model for aspiring people hasn't been nearly as hard or full. Maybe America can't yet be called another God that failed. But that's the direction in which our country is moving: more and more sharply downward.

Without Snowden, we wouldn't even have known what is being done in our name - which everyone now agrees must be discussed. His information did more than anything previously to make western Europeans disgusted with us. It is alienating - even angering - our allies and undercutting our influence. Worst of all, it's turning us, the people supposedly being served, from trusted citizens toward suspects who need watching. Snowden bears no responsibility for that. The blame lies with our stunning surveillance that was certain to be exposed sooner or later.

All life being risky, we must be willing to take some risks of enemy vengeance if we want to preserve our major differences from Soviet rule. Yes too, finding the right balance between protection and freedom of information is supremely difficult. But belief that it should be done in secret, without the benefit of enlightened discussion, is powerful hubris. As usual, the tiny likelihood of having all-wise leaders greatly contributes to grievous mistakes: ours, for now. Worst is the NSA's indiscriminate, unrestrained bugging of everyone, down to our supposedly best friends. During the Cold War, we manufactured 72,000 nuclear weapons although maybe seven would have been used in the most hideous possible nightmare. Our agencies embrace of massive excess continues.

Even if our closest allies who call our current practices "totally unacceptable" are hiding some spying on us, even if Russia joins them in that, we mustn't become our government's sheep. Thank you, Edward Snowden, for telling us how badly reform is needed. It would have been impossible without the knowledge you gave us.

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#51

www.russiatoday.com

February 11, 2014

Russian veterans seek political reassessment of Afghanistan war

The head of the Union of Afghan War Veterans is to ask the Russian President to reconsider the negative political assessment of the Soviet Union's military intervention in Afghanistan.

Frants Klintsevich was speaking at a conference dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Klintsevich, who is also a Lower House MP representing the United Russia Party, claimed that the "politically and legally groundless assessment of the Afghan war as a failed and reckless attempt" leads to many decisions concerning veterans not being fulfilled. The MP said he was going to address the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian military, President Vladimir Putin, with a request to revise the attitude to the conflict.

The deputy said that according to official statistics the Soviet military lost 15,000 people killed and over 50,000 wounded in Afghanistan. 417 servicemen were taken prisoners and only a third were returned home. Over 200,000 Russian servicemen were decorated for bravery during the war.

Russia deployed military forces in Afghanistan in 1979 after repeated requests by the Kabul government trying to suppress armed Islamist opposition. The war lasted for over nine years and ended in early 1989 with complete withdrawal of Soviet troops. The pro-Soviet government survived for three more years and fell only after the collapse of the Soviet Union when it stopped supplying weapons and goods.

In December 1989 the Congress of People's Deputies - the supreme legislative body of the Soviet Union - passed a resolution which condemned the military intervention in Afghanistan as politically and morally wrong. The same congress ordered changes to the Constitution that would set concrete rules for military aid to foreign countries and also asked the government to launch a state rehabilitation program to help veterans and the families of those killed.

On February 15 Russia and other ex-soviet states are celebrating the 25th anniversary of final withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Ukraine and Moldova officially made 2014 the year of veterans of the Afghan War. All countries of the Russia-led political bloc the Commonwealth of Independent States have agreed to issue commemorative medals to be awarded to veterans.

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#52

Georgian president to analyze Putin's remarks about their possible meeting

TBILISI, February 10. /ITAR-TASS/. Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili said he would "seriously analyze" Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks about a possible meeting between them.

"We watch closely every message from Russia because Georgian-Russian relations are among the most painful and thorny issues that are facing Georgia," Margvelashvili said. "Therefore we will analyze today's words [said by Putin] very seriously and thoroughly, hold consultations and form our position," he said.

"If there is a possibility that such a meeting will give a positive impetus to Georgian-Russian relations, if there is the readiness to discuss serious issues, this will naturally serve as the basis for consultations both inside Georgia and with our Western colleagues and as the basis for thinking about the possibility of holding such a meeting," the Georgian president said.

Replying to a question from a Georgian journalist at the Sochi Olympics media centre earlier in the day whether he would like to meet with the president of Georgia, Putin said: "Why not, if he

expresses such a wish."

"We would very much want to see the tragedies of previous years become a thing of the past as soon as possible. We understand that it is not an easy process, but Russia is committed to a positive development of relations with Georgia," the president added.

Margvelashvili said earlier he would continue efforts to normalize relations with Russia if elected.

"The new government of Georgia has taken a number of steps in the past several months to normalize relations with Russia. This policy will be continued," he said.
Possibility of dialogue

Russia and Georgia have been trying to normalize their relations on different fronts, including through the dialogue between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin and Georgian prime minister's special representative for relations with Russia Zurab Abashidze. Their next, sixth, meeting will take place in Prague in late February. The discussion would focus on "how to facilitate further development of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries, as well as cultural and humanitarian contacts," Abashidze said.

The talks with Karasin have "produced certain results" in terms of restoring and developing trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries, he noted.

"The meetings initiated by Georgia helped restore and develop trade, economic and cultural relations, tourism, and human contacts," Abashidze said. "This is only the beginning of hard work to normalize relations between the two countries," he added.

Russia has for the first time in six years allowed the import of Georgian wine, brandy, tea and dried fruits. Georgian tangerines, apples and pears had returned to the Russian market by November. As a result, bilateral trade turnover has increased manifold, with Moscow ranking among Georgia's top five trade partners.

In late December 2013, Margvelashvili said that the direct dialogue between Abashidze and Karasin had not used up its potential and would be continued.

He believes that such consultations "have helped restore trade, economic and cultural relations between the two countries" and "can foster a high level of trust between the states and provide the background for solving important issues in the future."

"A balanced policy"

Georgian Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze said her country would continue "a balanced policy" to normalize relations with Russia.

"Everyone understands that normalization of relations with Russia will be a difficult process. At the same time, the format of direct dialogue with Moscow, specifically in the Abashidze-Karasin format, has already produced positive results and this progress should be carried on," she said.

The minister reiterated that Georgia would continue "consistent policy" towards normalizing relations with Russia.

"Direct dialogue between Abashidze and Karasin has played an important role in this process," she said.

The minister said the sides "have made progress in restoring and developing trade, economic and humanitarian relations between the two countries."

However, she stressed that "relations with Russia will not be normalised to the detriment of

Georgia's territorial integrity."

The first meeting between Abashidze and Karasin took place in Geneva's suburbs on December 14, 2012 and the following three were held in Prague on March 1, June 5, September 19, 2013, and November 21, 2013.

Russia needs patience and time to understand where its relations with Georgia are, Karasin said. "We expect no quick and easy solutions. We will need patience and time to understand where we are in our bilateral relations, what has become more real and what remains unsolvable," he said.

Karasin said Russia and Georgia wished to build mutually advantageous long-standing relations.

"The era of maniacal animosity that was imposed by the previous leadership of Georgia is history now. We are jointly looking for solutions that would be based on mutual respect and mutual advantages," Karasin said. "The public opinion in our countries welcomes the improvement of atmosphere in relations between Russia and Georgia. In fact, Georgia has never been considered an enemy in Russia," he said.

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