



CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

## POLICY BRIEF

Spring 2012

### NATO AND SECURITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Proactive U.S. leadership is vital to security cooperation with allies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) through both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and direct bilateral mechanisms. NATO remains an indispensable force for regional stability, providing member states with essential elements of physical and political security. Strengthening the alliance should remain a top U.S. priority.

The CEEC advocated for the successful enlargement of NATO from the Baltic to the Black Seas and strongly urges U.S. Congress to support the NATO aspirations of Georgia and other qualified countries seeking membership. Georgian citizens have expressed their support for Georgia's entry into NATO several times, and Georgia is a substantial contributor of troops to NATO and to other international coalitions in Asia and the Middle East. The CEEC supports the NATO Enhancement Act, S. 2177, introduced by Sen. Richard Lugar, which would substantially strengthen NATO and NATO partnerships.

On February 8, 2012, NATO announced that it was extending its air policing operation over the Baltic countries until at least 2018. That program, first launched in 2004, is an excellent example of cooperative "smart defense." NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that the mission "continues to demonstrate the Alliance's commitment to collective defense and solidarity for all its members," and the CEEC welcomes such measures.

The CEEC also strongly urges the U.S. to pursue its program for missile defense in Europe despite Russian objections. The protection is needed given Iran's forward movement in developing ballistic missiles.

The CEEC supports the efforts of the United States, bilaterally and through NATO, to protect cyber infrastructure from disruption and aggression. It further urges the U.S, jointly with its NATO allies, to establish through cooperation, education, international best practices and collective responses, effective counter-measures against cyber attacks, cyber crime and cyber espionage. Acts of cyber aggression against NATO members also represent an ongoing security challenge to the United States.

#### Action Needed:

- **Support S. 2177, the NATO Enhancement Act, introduced by Sen. Richard Lugar to encourage further enlargement of NATO and to deepen U.S. strategic partnerships with NATO allies.**

## **DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW**

The CEEC staunchly supports democracy and the indispensable elements of the rule of law, human rights, minority rights, and historical accuracy, all of which are especially important in the CEE region, considering its history, previous Soviet domination, and ethnic, national and religious diversity. While democracies have emerged and developed in CEE since the collapse of communism, issues remain to be resolved. An autocratic regime still reigns in Belarus. Vestiges of intolerance and discrimination against national minorities linger even within some countries that have joined Western institutions. At the same time, accusations of such discrimination have been levied by Russia against other CEE countries as a propaganda tool to discredit them. Denial of crimes against humanity, including the Armenian Genocide, undermines the pillars of democracy.

Russian revisionist history denies or excuses Stalin-era atrocities and actions, such as the Holodomor in Ukraine, and the Soviet occupation and deportation of hundreds of thousands of CEE nationals. Russia's continual dissemination of propaganda that distorts and falsifies both current events and history is a powerful tool used to discredit and attack perceived adversaries. Democracy in Russia is threatened, as demonstrated by rampant fraud and corruption in its recent parliamentary and presidential elections.

An issue regularly on the U.S. agenda vis-à-vis Russia is the possible repeal of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. The CEEC is concerned that, if this were to occur, it not be interpreted as an approval of Russia's domestic and foreign policies. We therefore urge that any Congressional action be accompanied by comparable measures so that violations of human/minority rights and fundamental freedoms, aggressive policies, and undemocratic practices, not go unchecked.

The Russian government also uses many avenues to influence and attempt to dominate the countries of the CEE region. These have included both political and military actions, economic manipulation (*e.g.*, blocking energy transit, trade barriers, and cyber attacks), accusations of alleged maltreatment and discrimination against people of Russian descent living in CEE countries, and delay in the removal of Russian military forces from the region. In 2008, the Russian military forcibly annexed the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia of the Republic of Georgia, and the situation today remains unchanged.

U.S. foreign policy countering Russia's attempts to reestablish a "sphere of influence" in the region should emphasize the promotion of democratic principles and institutions within the Russian Federation. The CEEC urges that U.S. foreign policy also include the aim of improving Russia's relations with its neighbor nations, and that such policy be pursued in a forceful and proactive manner.

### **Action Needed:**

- **Cosponsor S. 1039, the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2011, introduced by Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), and H.R. 4405, introduced by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA). Ensure that any action taken regarding the Jackson-Vanik Amendment addresses human rights and democracy within Russia.**
- **Cosponsor H.Res. 304, a human rights bill affirming the Armenian Genocide, introduced by Rep. Robert Dold (R-IL) and Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), and S. Res. 399, introduced by Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Sen. Mark Kirk (R-IL).**

## VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

The pilot edition of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which allowed six EU countries from CEE (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) to join the VWP in 2008, expired in June 2009, leading to an automatic reinstatement of the standard eligibility rules.

These rules include requiring the aspiring country to have less than a 3 percent visa refusal rate in order to be eligible for participation in the Program (as opposed to 10 percent that was set in the Pilot). These rules have had the unfortunate effect for millions of CEE Americans, mostly of Polish descent, that their relatives still cannot travel freely to the U.S., regardless of years of proven, dependable friendship and loyalty to America.

The CEEC believes that it is in the best interest of the U.S. to have the Visa Waiver Program expanded, especially to countries that have demonstrated a capacity and willingness to cooperate with the U.S. in achieving counter-terrorism goals.

**The CEEC also supports the establishment of a new P visa category to cover groups and individuals coming to the U.S. for cultural purposes at the invitation of a U.S.-based group with ethnic ties to the invitee's country.** This new category includes those coming to present and/or teach ethnic or folk culture, music, theater, dance, or other artistic endeavors of the country of origin.

### Action Needed:

- **Cosponsor H.R. 3855/S. 2046, the Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act – currently under consideration by the Committees on the Judiciary (in the House and Senate) – that would allow for expansion of the VWP. The bill is a direct result of close cooperation between congressional offices and Departments of State and Homeland Security.**
- **Cosponsor S.2233, Jobs Originated through Launching Travel Act (JOLT) sponsored by Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) and corresponding H.R.3341, Visa Improvements to Stimulate International Tourism to the United States of America Act sponsored by Rep. Mazie Hirono (D-HI). Both bills aim to increase travel to the United State while modernizing the Visa Waiver Program incorporating provisions of H.R. 3855/S. 2046.**

## ENERGY

Energy affects the CEE region's political and economic viability, as well as its social stability. Russia is the current primary and in many cases sole source of gas and oil supplies, which it manipulates to attain its political and economic objectives. Evidence of such manipulation includes abrupt cut-offs of gas and oil to CEE countries, price escalations of natural gas to selected EU countries, redirection of gas transit routes through Nordstream, and reductions of gas supplies to Europe during the 2012 severe cold spell.

U.S. policy towards CEE should promote energy security and facilitate economic collaboration among countries in the region. The CEEC urges support for a NATO Center of Excellence for Energy Security (ENSEC COE) in Lithuania, which could help implement the NATO Strategic Concept of 2010's endorsement of developing "the capacity to contribute to energy security." In addition, support energy diversification and independence in the region, *e.g.*, development of safe shale gas technology, LNG infrastructure, alternative energy sources, as well as a gas corridor from the Caspian region to the CEE.

Additionally, Russian resources are being used to build two large nuclear power plants in Belarus and Kaliningrad, potentially exposing parts of the CEE region to serious nuclear devastation in case of an accident. At a minimum, the U.S. should ensure that compliance with internationally established standards occurs and encourage the EU to monitor and influence these developments.

## U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AND PROMOTION OF REGIONAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

While many countries within CEE have “graduated” from U.S. assistance programs as provided for under the SEED and FREEDOM Support Acts, U.S. funding should remain a priority for these countries, and at a minimum should be maintained at current levels. Security Assistance Programs levels to the region, such as Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET), should also be maintained.

Exchange programs, a part of public diplomacy, are an acknowledged and successful means of promoting international understanding, good will, and training to citizens of the United States and participating countries.

### Action Needed:

- **Join the Congressional Caucus on Central and East Europe, co-chaired by Rep. Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI) and Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL).**
- **Maintain FMF and IMET funding levels for CEE countries.**
- **Support robust funding for the countries of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, and continued assistance funding to support democracy in Belarus.**
- **Maintain funding for educational and cultural exchange programs.**

## BLACK RIBBON DAY

The CEEC supports the establishment of a national August 23 Black Ribbon Day, to honor and commemorate those who lost their lives, were tortured, deported, lost their property or otherwise suffered under the ravages of the Soviet Communist and Nazi regimes. These repressions touched many Americans of CEE extraction, being directly affected themselves, or having relatives and friends who suffered. The infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed on August 23, 1939, dividing Europe between the Soviet and Nazi regimes. In 2009, August 23 was designated Black Ribbon Day in Canada.

### Action Needed:

- **Support designating August 23 as Black Ribbon Day to commemorate the victims of Soviet Communist and Nazi regimes and the date of the signing of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.**

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### CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

American Hungarian Federation	Washington Chapter Czechoslovak National Council of America	Lithuanian American Community
American Latvian Association in the U.S.	Estonian American National Council	National Federation of American Hungarians
Armenian Assembly of America	Georgian Association in the USA	Polish American Congress
Belarusian-American Association	Hungarian American Coalition	Slovak League of America
Bulgarian Institute for Research and Analysis	Joint Baltic American National Committee	Ukrainian Congress Committee of America
Congress of Romanian Americans	Lithuanian American Council	Ukrainian National Association