



CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

POLICY BRIEF

Fall 2011

The Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), representing more than 20 million Americans, regularly issues Policy Papers to share concerns and ideas with the United States Congress and Administration.

The current paper covers issues of interest during the 112th Congress and its First Session in 2011.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE RULE OF LAW

The CEEC staunchly supports democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and recognizes that indispensable elements of democracy in the region include respect for the rule of law, human rights, minority rights, and historical accuracy. These elements are intertwined and especially important in Central and Eastern Europe, considering its history, Soviet domination of the countries in the area, and the ethnic, national and religious diversity of the region.

While democracies have emerged and developed in Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of communism, 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 against other CEE countries as a propaganda tool to discredit them.

Denial, revisionism, human and minority rights abuses, and the failure to respect the rule of law also pose serious challenges that must not be ignored. Revisionist history regarding Stalin-era atrocities, such as the Holodomor in Ukraine and Soviet deportations of tens of thousands of Baltic nationals and others, as well as the denial of other crimes against humanity, including the Armenian Genocide, undermines the pillars of democracy.

Action Needed:

- **Cosponsor S.735, the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2011, introduced in response to the brutal post-election crackdown by the Lukashenka regime.**
- **Cosponsor H.Res. 304, a human rights bill affirming the Armenian Genocide, introduced by Congressmen Robert Dold (R-IL) and Adam Schiff (D-CA).**
- **Support human and minority rights in the region.**
- **Ensure that positions and actions taken are based on facts and historical accuracy.**

RUSSIA'S UNDUE INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Throughout history, the Russian government has sought to influence and dominate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Attempts in recent history 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 citizens of Russian descent living in Central and East European 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. The CEEC commends the U.S. Senate for unanimous adoption of S. Res. 175, calling for removal of Russian forces from Georgia. However, the situation on the ground remains unchanged, with Russian troops stationed close to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, constantly threatening stability throughout country. The military exercises conducted by combined Russian and Belarusian forces in 2010 in the areas bordering Poland and Lithuania are another example of a recent show of intimidation.

U.S. foreign policy countering Russia's attempts to reestablish its "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 it be pursued in a forceful and proactive manner.

In addition, an issue regularly on the agenda vis-à-vis Russia, is the possible lifting of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. We are concerned that, if such action were to occur, it not be interpreted as an approval of Russia's domestic and foreign policies. We therefore urge that should any Congressional action be taken to repeal Jackson-Vanik, it be accompanied by comparable measures so that the Russian government's violations of human/minority rights and fundamental freedoms, its aggressive policies, and its undemocratic practices not go unchecked.

For that reason, the CEEC seeks support for S. 1039, the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2011 (H.R. 1575, as the Justice for Sergei Magnitsky Act of 2011). As summarized in an August 8 editorial in the Washington Post, the "case of Sergei Magnitsky has come to symbolize the rampant and often violent corruption plaguing the Russian state." The Act "is a broad human rights bill that would invoke a travel ban against serious violators of human rights, freeze any U.S. assets they may possess and publish their names — a powerful deterrent for those craving respectability and legitimacy in the West." Central and East European communities in the United States appreciate the significance of this measure, as human rights were violated for a nearly a century in the region during communist rule and the Soviet occupation.

Action Needed:

- **Join the Congressional Caucus on Central and East Europe, co-chaired by Congressmen Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI) and Daniel Lipinski (D-IL).**
- **Call on the Administration to utilize all resources to limit Russian pressure on the region.**
- **Ensure that any action taken with respect to the Jackson-Vanik Amendment takes into account human rights and democracy within Russia.**
- **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), supporting a travel ban against serious violators of human rights, and to freeze any U.S. assets they may possess, etc. The House version is H.R. 1575, introduced by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA), and is titled the Justice for Sergei Magnitsky Act of 2011.**

VISA ISSUES

The pilot edition of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which allowed six EU countries from Central and Eastern Europe (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 Americans, mostly of Polish descent, that their relatives still cannot travel freely to the United States, regardless of years of proven, dependable friendship and loyalty to the United States.

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

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

Action Needed:

- **Cosponsor H.R. 959/S. 497, the Secure Travel and Counterterrorism Partnership Program Act of 2011 – currently under consideration by the Committees on the Judiciary (in the House and Senate) that would allow for expansion of the VWP based on the visa overstay rate.**
- **Ensure that mechanisms for measuring a key VWP eligibility provision, *i.e.*, the overstay rate, are successfully and completely implemented and provide accurate and timely data.**
- **In cooperation with the Departments of State and Homeland Security, develop attainable strategies and mechanisms for expansion of the VWP, *e.g.*, re-opening until *e.g.* 2013, the pilot version of the Program.**
- **Introduce and support legislation to establish a new P visa category.**

SECURITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The CEEC strongly supports proactive U.S. leadership in security collaboration with allies in Central and Eastern Europe through NATO as well as 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 U.S. priority.

The CEEC played an important role in advocating for the successful enlargement of NATO from the Baltic to the Black Seas. Today, we strongly support Georgia's NATO aspirations. Georgian citizens 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 U.S. policy towards Central and Eastern Europe must also include the facilitation of greater energy security and economic collaboration among countries in the region. Promoting cooperation between the CEE countries and energy producers in the Caspian region and the Middle East would ensure the successful implementation of the EU's efforts to develop an alternative natural gas corridor aimed at increasing energy independence in Central and Eastern Europe. The Southern Gas Corridor and its backbone project, Nabucco, should be the primary focus of U.S. energy and security policy in the region.

Additionally, Russian resources are being used to build two large nuclear power plants in Belarus and Kaliningrad, both bordering Lithuania. A serious nuclear disaster, as the one that occurred 25 years ago in Chernobyl, illustrates the potential pitfalls when transparency and safety are ignored, and the recent catastrophe in Japan underscores the vast impact that a nuclear disaster can have. It is critical that the construction and operation of any nuclear power plant be accompanied by transparency, attention to safety, and adherence to international norms. None of this seems to be happening with respect to the two proposed plants, and at a minimum the United States should ensure that compliance with internationally established standards occurs. Moreover, if such plants are controlled by the Kremlin and Russian oligarchs, energy diversification in the region is hindered.

Action Needed:

- **Support the NATO aspirations of Georgia and other qualified countries.**
- **Maintain Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding for Central and East European countries.**
- **Support energy security and diversification programs in the region, with particular attention to safeguards with respect to nuclear power plants, including adherence to internationally established standards.**

CYBER SECURITY

The cyber terrain encompasses the global community and affects numerous key activities including critical infrastructures both in the public and private sectors. The 2007 cyber attacks on Estonia, a NATO member, were acts of aggression by the Russian government. In addition, as recognized by ForeignPolicy.com, the attacks on Georgia that occurred prior to Russia's military invasion in August 2008 were "a seminal moment in cyber war because it was the first integration of offensive cyber operations into political-military strategy." The CEEC believes strongly that these acts of aggression by Russia are a direct threat to NATO and thus represent an ongoing security challenge to the United States.

In recognition of its reliance on permanent and unfettered access to cyberspace and integrity of its critical systems, NATO identified the need to improve its capabilities to detect, assess, prevent, defend, and recover in cases of a cyber attacks against the Alliance. NATO began implementation of this policy through the establishment of the Cyber Defense Management Authority (CDMA), operating under the auspices of the Emerging Security Challenges Division in NATO HQ. The CDMA is supported by the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn, Estonia.

The CEEC supports the efforts of the United States, bilaterally and through NATO, to protect cyber infrastructure from disruption and aggression, including in Central and Eastern Europe. It further urges the United States, jointly with its NATO allies, to create an infrastructure of cooperation through education, international best practices and collective responses to effectively counter cyber attacks, cyber crime and cyber espionage.

Action Needed:

- **Offer support for CEE bilaterally and through NATO to participate in the process of building best practices and collective security in the new internationally recognized cyber sphere.**
- **Continued support for NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Estonia.**
- **Conduct studies on cyber security issues.**

U.S. ASSISTANCE TO THE REGION

While many countries within Central and Eastern Europe 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.

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:

- **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.**

Our Organizations:

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

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