



CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

116th Congress Policy Brief - Autumn 2020 (effective as of September 11th)

The Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), representing more than 20 million American voters whose heritage lies in this region, regularly shares its concerns and ideas with the United States Congress and Administration. With the support of our Senators and Representatives, we routinely advocate for the introduction of specific legislation that addresses our issues. Our continuing priorities for the region are reflected below.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, THE RULE OF LAW, AND THE INFORMATION WAR

The CEEC supports democracy and its indispensable elements: the rule of law, human rights, minority rights, freedom of the press, and historical accuracy. **Our most immediate concerns are the fraudulent elections in Belarus held on August 9, 2020, and the ensuing violent crackdown against unarmed and peaceful protesters throughout that country.** The CEEC condemns the violence against peaceful protesters; incarceration of those who exercise their right of freedom of expression; interference with access to the internet and free media; and measures against international journalists by the illegitimate regime of Alexander Lukashenka. The August 9, 2020 presidential election results were falsified, and Lukashenka cannot be recognized as the leader of Belarus.

We urge the U.S. Government to coordinate with European governments to **require that a new presidential election take place**, as soon as possible, with all necessary steps taken to ensure transparency and fairness. In addition, the CEEC strongly reaffirms its position that **the U.S. Government cannot condone any effort by Russia to subvert Belarus's sovereignty**, whether through military or other means, and any such effort should be rejected through means similar to the Welles Declaration of 1940, and any documents signed by Lukashenka which may purport to undermine Belarusian independence must be declared null and void.

The CEEC supports **ongoing reforms to address management and mission of international broadcasters, further empowering fair and unbiased journalists, and to broaden media literacy for consumers.** We applaud the recent increase in airtime of RFE/RL's Belarus service, and look forward to its transmissions strengthening, along with support for VOA's Belarus service as well.

Denial of crimes against humanity – including the 1915 Armenian and 1932-33 Ukrainian (Holodomor) Genocides – undermines the pillars of democracy. Turkey's and Russia's denials of these genocides – along with the Kremlin's continued disinformation about the legacy of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and subsequent WWII history and aftermath – distort and falsify both current events and history. **The Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation attacks are powerful tools that exploit democratic institutions and values, particularly during elections and the COVID-19 pandemic.**

NATO AND SECURITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The CEEC is very concerned over the planned withdrawal of large numbers of American troops from Germany. Such a move would directly weaken the security of frontline states like the Baltic nations and Poland – and of the United States and the rest of NATO by extension; reduce U.S. influence in Europe; and embolden Russian President Putin to continue or increase his aggressive policies that threaten European democracy and transatlantic security. U.S. forces in Germany give operational credibility to American and NATO forces operating out of Poland and the Enhanced Forward Presence battalions in the Baltic nations. **We ask that U.S. force levels in Germany remain at their current levels or higher.**

The CEEC strongly supports continued military cooperation with our NATO and non-NATO partners at current or increased levels. While we welcome NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence mission and European Deterrence Initiative authorizations, we support increases to Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for all nations in the CEE region and specifically **call for maximum funding levels for Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and the Baltic countries.**

In keeping with our history of successful advocacy for enlargement of NATO, we continue to urge U.S. support for NATO membership for qualified countries. We also call for NATO's capabilities to evolve to meet a changing security environment, including cyber, information, and other forms of hybrid warfare.

CONTINUED RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

Russian military actions against Ukraine, belligerence against the U.S. and its allies, and Russian government disinformation campaigns leading to electoral tampering have been noted by U.S. government officials as the primary geo-strategic challenge facing our foreign policy. **The CEEC advocates for a tougher stance that targets the multiple aggressive approaches taken by Russia,** particularly against Ukraine and Georgia, whose territories continue to be occupied by regular Russian and irregular troops. We condemn extrajudicial and transnational assassination attempts and poisonings of Kremlin opponents, including Alexei Navalny. **We welcome programs like the Three Seas Initiative that bolster integration, increase U.S. influence, and deflect the Kremlin's influence in the region.**

We call upon the 116th Congress to bolster and further implement the bipartisan Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act of 2017 (CAATSA). The CEEC believes further measures are warranted, **to include sanctioning additional individuals, banks and institutions and strengthening banking regulations** in order to maximize the economic impact of the sanctions. We also urge the Administration and Congress to consider the deselection of Russian banks from the SWIFT network.

UKRAINE

The 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea were egregious violations of international law. The building of the Kerch Strait bridge and the Russian Navy's November 2018 attack on the Ukrainian Navy are recent examples of the Kremlin's outright disregard for the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. CEEC members stand in solidarity with Ukraine's fight to restore its territorial integrity, institute reforms, and firmly establish democratic values and institutions. We favor **enhanced appropriations for defensive military support and welcoming the nation into Euro-Atlantic structures.**

ENERGY SECURITY

Energy security, safety and clean technology are vital to the CEE region. Significant mishaps in recent years demonstrate Russia's disregard for nuclear safety. The CEEC urges the Administration to **support enforcement of sanctions** that bar Russian firms from bypassing financing, technology and funds transfer, and asset transaction directives. We call for U.S. policies supporting **continued U.S. sanctions that push back on Nord Stream 2 (NS2),** a pipeline that would give Russia greater political leverage over countries dependent on Russian gas. **The pipeline is in direct contravention of the European Energy Security and Diversification Act of 2019** and the EU's own policy objective to diversify energy sources, and yet it is supported by Germany and is being built by Gazprom, Russia's state-sponsored enterprise. We commend U.S. sanctions that have delayed NS2 completion until late 2020 or early 2021.