



CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

POLICY BRIEF

Spring 2015

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UKRAINE

The riveting Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine’s central Maidan during the brutal winter of 2013-2014 demonstrated a people’s desire to define their nation's political identity and their determination to integrate into Western institutions.

In the context of U.S. geo-strategic interests, the current war against Ukraine has far-reaching consequences for the world's security. Russian President Putin’s declared objective to establish a “Russkiy Mir” (Russian World) has resulted in the violation of international borders, the seizure and illegal occupation of Ukraine’s territory, the illegal annexation of Crimea, and a continuing war waged by Russian troops and their proxies.

This war, started by Russian clandestine operatives, is about to enter its second year. It has displaced a million Ukrainian citizens and killed over 6,000. It is rightly viewed with alarm by the United States and our NATO allies. It has de-stabilized the transatlantic security framework that emerged since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine's inclusion into Euro-Atlantic structures clearly serves U.S. national interests. The security of the United States lies in the expansion of democracy, not in the appeasement of aggressor states making imperial claims. Furthermore, the United States, with the United Kingdom and Russia, publicly affirmed in the Trilateral Agreement (known as the Budapest Memorandum) to guarantee Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In exchange, Ukraine renounced its nuclear weapons and acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear state.

Action Needed:

- **Cosponsor legislation to provide military assistance to Ukraine, including:**
 - **H.R. 955, introduced by Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), to authorize assistance to the military and national security forces of Ukraine, and S.452, a bill to provide defensive weapons to the government of Ukraine to defend itself, introduced by Sen. James M. Inhofe (R-OK).**

- **H.R. 93, the "Crimea Annexation Non-recognition Act," which prohibits the United States from recognizing the de jure or de facto annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, introduced by Rep. Gerald Connolly (D-VA).**
- **H. Res. 50, similar to S. Res. 52 passed on February 12, 2015, calling for the release of Ukrainian fighter pilot Nadiya Savchenko, who was captured by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and has been held illegally in a Russian prison since July 2014, introduced by Rep. Sander M. Levin (D-MI).**
- **S. Res. 60/S. Res. 72, expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the January 24, 2015, attacks carried out by Russian-backed rebels on the civilian population in Mariupol, Ukraine, and the provision of military assistance to Ukraine, introduced by Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI).**
- **H.R. 56, the Donbass People's Militia Terrorist Designation Act of 2015, introduced by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX).**
- **H. Res. 122, providing assistance to Ukraine to fulfill economic, social, and government reform requirements necessary for membership eligibility to the European Union, in keeping with the will of a majority of the people of Ukraine and their Government, introduced by Rep. Michael G. Fitzpatrick (R-PA).**
- **Demand withdrawal of covert and overt Russian forces and equipment from Ukraine and compliance with cease-fire agreements. Use increasing and effective sanctions to achieve such withdrawal and compliance.**
- **Demand that the President provide Ukraine with defensive equipment, services, and training in order to counter offensive weapons and reestablish its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as per H.R. 5859 enacted on December 18, 2014.**

The crisis in Eastern Europe and Ukraine, specifically, will not just go away. In an informationally interconnected and economically interdependent world, the United States must take the lead in promoting international norms and consolidating geo-political stability. With American support, a democratic, independent Ukraine can be a keystone of freedom in the region.

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, 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. Denial of crimes against humanity, including the Armenian and Ukrainian Genocides of 1915 and 1932-33, respectively, undermines the pillars of democracy. Other threats to democracy include a lack of separation of powers, a less than independent judiciary as well as corruption. The latter is especially worrisome because it not only undermines democratic institutions and economic well-being, it also enables Russia to pursue its aggressive policies by penetrating and influencing both the public and private sectors, including military preparedness. Consequently, corruption also poses a security threat to the region, the EU and the US.

Action Needed:

- **Cosponsor H.R. 624 and S. 284, the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, introduced by Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ) and Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-MD).**

- **Ensure that Magnitsky Act sanctions against the Putin regime are fully implemented. The United States should closely monitor human rights and corruption issues in the Russian Federation as required by the Magnitsky Act.**
- **Cosponsor H.R. 450, the Protect Democracy From Criminal Corporations Act, introduced by Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN).**
- **Introduce and cosponsor legislation to ensure that U.S. international broadcasting efforts effectively counter Russian disinformation.**
- **Cosponsor H. Res. 154, introduced by Rep. Robert J. Dold (R-IL), calling on the President to work toward equitable, constructive, stable, and durable Armenian-Turkish relations based upon the Republic of Turkey's full acknowledgment of the facts and ongoing consequences of the Armenian Genocide, and a fair, just, and comprehensive international resolution of this crime against humanity.**

The Russian government uses many avenues in its attempts to dominate the countries of the CEE region. Putin's ongoing war in Ukraine is just one example. Others include 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 also disinformation and propaganda.

Russia sees the aspirations of neighboring CEE countries toward integration with the EU as a threat. As a reaction, it has threatened economic consequences should aspiring countries advance EU Association Agreements and has pressured them to join an alternative Russian-dominated Eurasian Customs Union. 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 the United States to condemn Russia's blatant intimidation and attempts to undermine the independence of countries in the region. U.S. policies towards Russia in this regard should be pursued in a forceful and proactive manner.

The CEEC strongly supported the Magnitsky Act. In the spirit of that law, its provisions need to be fully implemented and expanded to include sanctions against other human rights violators in the Russian Federation. While Putin's crimes against Ukraine are growing, Moscow's increasing crackdown against its own citizens is also troubling. Until human rights are respected by Russia, both outside of and within its borders, it is critical that the United States continue to help expose violations by the Russian Federation, and to defend internationally recognized human rights and freedoms.

Russian revision of history denies or excuses Stalin-era atrocities and actions, such as the Holodomor (Famine-Genocide) in Ukraine, Soviet occupation of CEE countries, and murder and deportation of millions of CEE nationals.

Russia's propaganda distorts and falsifies both current events and history. It is a powerful tool used to discredit and attack perceived adversaries. Democracy in Russia is threatened, as demonstrated by the repression of NGOs, election fraud and rampant corruption. The United States needs to lend its moral voice against human rights abuses. The United States must counter Putin via the airwaves, to expose Moscow's lies and present our values via competent and fully-funded U.S. international broadcasting. The CEEC supports important reforms to address the Broadcasting Board of Governors' management structure, clarify the mission of our international broadcasters, and empower our journalists.

NATO AND SECURITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In the face of Russia's aggressive actions NATO must respond by strengthening its collective defense and supporting regional partners – including Ukraine, Georgia, and other CEE countries. In 2008, Russian troops forcibly annexed the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, keeping heavy military presence in close proximity to the strategic East-West transportation corridor. In 2014, Russian troops forcibly annexed Crimea, and are attempting to take over parts of eastern Ukraine. Proactive U.S. leadership is vital to NATO's continued effectiveness, to protect peace and security in Europe. Russia's war on Ukraine and continued escalation of armed conflict threatens both Ukraine's independence and the welfare of tens of millions of Europeans. A strong, coordinated military force is essential to stop Russia as it continues to destabilize its neighbors and disrespect international rules.

Russia's intimidation of the Baltic countries must cease. These intimidation tactics include: the kidnapping of Estonian security official Eston Kohver from Estonian territory, incursion into Baltic airspace by military aircraft, large scale military exercises adjacent to Lithuania and Poland, a simulated nuclear attack against Warsaw, as well as disruption of sea traffic by unscheduled naval exercises within the Baltic countries' sea zone. Without strong military support, treaties and cease-fire agreements will continue to be breached.

The CEEC advocated for the successful enlargement of NATO over the past two decades, and continues to urge the U.S. Congress to support NATO membership for qualified countries. The passage of H. Res. 56 to support Macedonia's accession to NATO, and legislation to extend membership to Ukraine, Georgia and other qualified CEE countries, are vital to defend sovereign integrity, secure peace and democracy.

The CEEC believes it is time to establish permanent NATO bases in the Alliance's eastern member states, since any objection has been removed by Russia's war on Ukraine. The CEEC supports both increased NATO and U.S. bi-lateral military assistance to Ukraine and Georgia to achieve peace and security, as well as stability on NATO's eastern flank.

The CEEC urges the United States to review its current planned missile defense system, and re-align it to more effectively protect all NATO member states, allies and partners.

The CEEC also supports the efforts of the United States, bilaterally and through NATO, to protect cyber infrastructure from disruption and aggression. This includes establishing effective counter-measures against cyber attacks, cyber crime and cyber espionage.

Action Needed:

- **Support NATO membership for aspiring CEE countries.**
- **Support increased spending for NATO operations in FY 2016 through the U.S. Department of Defense appropriations bill.**
- **Establish permanent NATO bases in Poland and the Baltic countries to provide increased training and weaponry.**
- **Call for the release of kidnapped Estonian Eston Kohver.**

VISA WAIVER PROGRAM AND IMMIGRATION REFORM

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

The VWP pilot allowed six EU countries from CEE (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) to join the VWP in 2008. However, for those not admitted during the pilot, such as Poland and others, an automatic reinstatement of the standard eligibility rules occurred in June 2009. 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 United States.

The CEEC also supports fair and equitable immigration laws, which include a pathway to citizenship, as well as the establishment of a new P visa category to cover groups and individuals coming to the United States for cultural/educational 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. 1401, Jobs Originated through Launching Travel Act of 2015, introduced by Rep. Joseph Heck (R-NV), and other legislation that would modify the VWP to allow further expansion to include the most dependable U.S. allies, such as Poland.**
- **Support reform of immigration laws that offer a pathway to citizenship.**

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

While many countries within CEE have “graduated” from U.S. assistance programs under the SEED and FREEDOM Support Acts, U.S. funding should remain a priority for Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Security assistance programs to the region, such as Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET), should be enhanced. Also, funds should continue to be devoted to promoting democracy in Belarus. Furthermore, financial and other support for governmental and non-governmental programs directed towards anti-corruption efforts and development of civil society in the region are critical.

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, and need to be continued.

Action Needed:

- **Join the Congressional Caucus on Central and East Europe.**
- **Enhance FMF and IMET funding levels for CEE countries.**
- **Support robust funding for the countries of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, and continued assistance to promote democracy in Belarus.**
- **Maintain funding for educational and cultural exchange programs.**

TRADE AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

An essential component to achieving and maintaining well-functioning democracies in CEE is having healthy and growing economies. The CEEC favors policies and reforms that encourage the continued integration of CEE countries into Western institutional structures, thus supporting their economic development. The CEEC supports expansion of opportunities to realize the benefits of economic growth, through increased trade, and market economic systems based on the rule of law, appropriate regulation, transparency, and ethical business practices.

Action needed:

- **Cosponsor H. Res. 73, introduced by Rep. Rodney P. Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), recognizing the importance of trade to the U.S. economy and the importance of completing free trade agreements with Pacific Rim countries and the European Union.**
- **Actively support and implement U.S. foreign and defense policies that strengthen CEE countries in moving toward greater integration with Western institutions.**
- **Monitor Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations to ensure that the agreement mutually benefits the United States and the countries of the CEE region.**

Currently, a number of CEE countries are in various stages of pursuing increased economic integration with Western institutions, particularly through adoption of Association Agreements (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with the EU. The CEEC opposes Russia's pressure on countries to defect from the AA process and instead, move toward integration with a Russia-dominated customs union. The CEEC strongly favors the continued integration of CEE countries into Western institutions, and believes that the active support of U.S. foreign and defense policy is crucial to success of the integration process.

A number of CEE countries that are well integrated into EU institutions are striving to improve their economic performance, provide better employment opportunities, and adjust to the challenges of a dynamic, competitive world economy. The CEEC supports the negotiations of the proposed TTIP agreement. The agreement aims to expand the already robust economic relationship between the United States and the EU, through further reduction of tariffs, and better coordination of regulatory regimes, which will support trade-in-services and encourage a robust investment climate. The CEEC seeks to ensure that the agreement benefits both the United States and all of the countries of the CEE region.

ENERGY

Energy security and safety are vital to the energy deficient CEE region. Currently, Russia is the primary and, in many cases, sole source of gas and oil supplies, which it manipulates to attain its political and economic objectives. This is evident with abrupt cut-offs of gas and oil to CEE countries, price escalations to selected EU countries, and redirection and/or reductions of gas supplies to Europe, such as disrupted natural gas supplies to Ukraine in June 2014.

U.S. policies could assure a secure and safe source of energy to the CEE countries. First, U.S. policy should facilitate immediate and prioritized export of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies to NATO countries, and any other foreign country that promotes U.S. national security interests. Secondly, it is essential that U.S. policy support interconnection of electrical and gas resources with their western EU counterparts to improve efficient utilization of energy supplies. Third, U.S. policies must provide certainty for investment and technology to provide for the geographic diversification of energy supplies and efficient utilization of resources in the CEE region.

Action Needed:

- **Cosponsor legislation to facilitate LNG exports and enhance energy security in the CEE countries, such as:**
 - **H.R. 351, LNG Permitting Certainty and Transparency Act (Johnson R-OH).**
 - **H.R. 287, American Job Creation and Strategic Alliances LNG Act (Turner R-OH).**
 - **H.R. 89, the Domestic Prosperity and Global Freedom Act (Bridenstine R-OK).**
 - **H.R. 428, the Export American Natural Gas Act of 2015 (Poe R-TX).**
 - **H.R. 156, Crude Oil Export Act (McCaul R-TX).**

The passage of legislation to facilitate exports of LNG from the United States would loosen Russia’s monopoly of energy supplies and their use for political manipulation throughout Europe. LNG exports will lead to the establishment of global gas markets with non-discriminatory pricing, thus making it difficult for Russia to dictate pricing based on geopolitics. A global LNG market would promote transparency in pricing and invigorate investments and economic developments.

The CEEC is also concerned about the operations and accident hazards posed by a nuclear power plant being constructed in Belarus just across from Lithuania’s border and just 30 miles away from Lithuania’s capital Vilnius with a population of about 700,000. The United States should actively advocate for full compliance of any new nuclear power plant with internationally established safety standards and monitoring while such plants are constructed.

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. National Black Ribbon Day is already officially observed by EU members, Canada, and Georgia.

Action Needed:

- **Re-introduce legislation to designate August 23rd as Black Ribbon Day.**

CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

American Hungarian Federation	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
Belarusan-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