

**STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED  
PROGRAMS APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL  
YEAR 2018**

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**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2017**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met at 2:30 p.m., in room SD-192, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lindsey Graham (chairman) presiding.

Present: Senators Graham, McCain, Leahy, Rubio, Coons, Shaheen, Lankford, Van Hollen, Daines, Merkley, and Murphy.

**CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES ON RUSSIA**

**STATEMENTS OF:**

**VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA, VICE CHAIRMAN OF OPEN RUSSIA  
LAURA JEWETT, REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF EURASIA PROGRAMS,  
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE  
JAN ERIK SUROTCHAK, REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR EUROPE FROM  
THE INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE**

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM**

Senator GRAHAM. The subcommittee will come to order. Our hearing today is on Civil Society Perspectives on Russia.

A couple of weeks ago we had a hearing about what Russia is doing regarding frontline states: the Baltics; Ukraine; Georgia; Poland; how Russia engages neighboring democracies; and the effort of the Putin government to undermine democracy in his backyard.

Today we are going to learn what it's like in Russia itself, the rollback of democracy by the Putin regime, and the biggest victims of all: the Russian people. We have an incredible hearing today. I am very honored to have witnesses who will tell us what's really going on inside of Russia.

Our first witness is Vladimir Kara-Murza, Vice-Chairman of Open Russia. I'll talk about him just in a moment; Laura Jewett, Senior Associate and Regional Director for Eurasia from the National Democratic Institute; Jan Surotchak, Regional Director for Europe from the International Republican Institute.

After opening statements by myself and Senator Leahy, we will have 7-minute rounds and I am asking the witnesses if they could limit their testimony to 7 minutes. The bottom line is I am going to introduce the man who needs no introduction now and some would say doesn't deserve one, but I do.

Senator McCain is going to introduce Mr. Kara-Murza. I just want to say this about Senator McCain. Of all of the voices, and it has been very bipartisan when it comes to condemning the Putin regime, no one has been louder and more forceful and more eloquent than Senator McCain.

Senator McCain, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee.

I will just make brief remarks in my introduction, but I would mention to the subcommittee the first time I met Vladimir was when he came to my office many years ago with another great Russian patriot, Boris Nemtsov. And that was just one of a series of visits as Boris Nemtsov, a former member of the administration of Boris Yeltsin was one of the most important leaders of the opposition in Russia.

And the last meeting I had with Vladimir Kara-Murza and with Boris, I said to him, "I don't think you should go back to Russia because I think your life is in danger." And he said, "Yes, I know it is, but I have to go back to my country." And I believe it was 1 month later in the shadow of the Kremlin someone walked up and fired a gun and murdered him, clearly under surveillance, clearly in the shadow of the Kremlin.

Losing Boris Nemtsov was a tragic loss for Russia and the cause of human rights throughout the world. And I believe that Vladimir Kara-Murza has, by living his life, has honored the memory of Boris Nemtsov. He's been brave, outspoken, relentless champion for the Russian people. And twice, not once, but twice, he has been poisoned in an attempt to murder him, twice. And this is a string, as the subcommittee knows, of people being thrown from fourth floor hotel rooms, of people being shot, people being poisoned.

It's very clear that Vladimir Putin has decided that he will eliminate his opponents and anyone who stands up for democracy and freedom. And he does so with relative impunity. So despite the attempts on Vladimir's life, the revolutionary spirit of this brave Russian patriot is unbroken.

And I would just like to summarize, Mr. Chairman, by saying this same spirit is true of Vladimir's countrymen who joined protests this past weekend in nearly 100 Russian cities against the tyranny and corruption of the Putin regime. I've been particularly heartened to learn that so many of the thousands who exercised their rights were young people and students. These patriots were fully aware of their risks. Indeed, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were detained in a revealing sign of the insecurity of the Putin regime, but they persisted in speaking truth to power, chanting, "Russia will be free."

Because of the determination of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the multitudes of patriotic Russians just like him, I remain hopeful that the cause of truth and justice for the Russian people will be victorious.

I thank the subcommittee for their pursuit and examination of the situation regards to not just United States relations with Russia, but Russia's relations with the world. And I thank Ranking

Member Senator Leahy also for his many years engagement in this issue. I thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member and Members of the subcommittee.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Senator McCain. I'll be very brief, and then we will get on with the testimony and Senator Leahy will make an opening statement.

The purpose of this hearing is to make a case for a Counter Russia account in our appropriations bill. This subcommittee has jurisdiction and charge of all foreign assistance, the State Department. Now it is time has come for the Congress to set up a Counter Russia account to help front line states and organizations who are fighting back against Putin's regime, try to create some opportunities to help them financially. It is in American taxpayers' interest that we push back against Putin's efforts to dismantle democracy throughout the world.

I would just say that what happened the last couple of days is encouraging to me, that people are taking to the streets in Russia to push back. It was 17,000 today, but it will be 50,000 and eventually more and more and more.

How does this movie end? It always ends the same way, but it takes people like Mr. Kara-Murza and others willing to risk their lives. It takes voices from the International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) to tell the Congress and the world what is actually going inside of a dictatorship. Putin himself declares to be worth \$101,000. Some estimates range from \$40 to \$70 billion, and there is a gentleman who thinks he is worth \$200 billion.

All I can say is whatever he has over the salary of being President of Russia comes at the expense of the Russian people. He and the Prime Minister have stolen the country blind and it is only a matter of time before people in Russia get tired of living this way where a few have almost everything and most struggle.

So hopefully this Counter Russia account will empower people to push back more effectively. Hopefully this hearing today will shed some light on what is actually going on with Putin's regime and this subcommittee will put together a Counter Russia account and hopefully the Senate as a whole will pass new sanctions against Russia for interfering in our election, and they did, and for their effort to undermine democracy.

The Putin regime knows no boundaries. They will kill. They will steal. They will do whatever is necessary to stay in power. It is my hope that we, the democratic world, the American people, will stand by those like Mr. Kara-Murza who are willing to die for what we sometimes take for granted, freedom.

So, with that, Senator Leahy.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I agree with you. When I read articles about Mr. Kara-Murza I am amazed at your courage and tenacity, but thankful that you are alive and can speak out.

And our friend, John McCain, who just spoke, we are different parties. We have been absolutely united on condemning what Rus-

sia is doing and I am glad he and Senator Graham have spoken out.

Mr. Chairman, I want to make one observation. For the past month or two our staffs have been working daily with their House counterparts to finalize our fiscal year 2017 bill. They had just about everything worked out when on Friday we learned the White House may be proposing a \$2.8 billion cut to the 2017 allocation.

Those cuts would be arbitrary and indefensible. The people who are suggesting them have no idea what these programs do or what the cuts would mean for our ability to remain engaged as the world's super power. As the Secretary of Defense said, if you start cutting these programs you'd better buy him more bullets because he is going to need them.

Now, 3 weeks ago we heard testimony from officials of five former Soviet republics that have been subjected to an intensifying pattern of threats, extortion, and in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, military invasion and occupation by the Russian Government.

At the hearing, I said that while we have long condemned Russia's attempts to intimidate its neighbors, we have come to appreciate the challenges those countries face even more since we have learned of Russia's actions in our own Presidential election.

Vladimir Putin has used his power not only to extend Russia's sphere of influence in violation of international law, but as the chairman pointed out, he has created a kleptocracy. Another way to describe it is a kleptocracy that has enabled him and his closest friends to amass enormous personal wealth. Just look at what they did during the Winter Olympics and the billions that were stolen there.

He can get away with it because he has simultaneously and systematically silenced his critics. Human rights activists and independent journalists have been arrested. They have been physically abused. They have been sentenced to years in prison on fabricated charges, and some have been murdered. The same with civil society organizations, harassed, offices vandalized, leaders imprisoned and tortured or assassinated.

Even those who were once close to Putin's inner circle have been tracked down and killed when they spoke of corruption and thus became a liability. The recent assassination of Denis Voronenkov in Ukraine is widely suspected of being the work of the Russian Government.

We have supported programs to assist civil society organizations in Russia. We have in many countries. And we should, but it is amazing to me that knowing the Russian Government can imprison or kill anyone it wants to, you, sir, have the courage to continue to speak out.

It is easy for us to criticize as we sit here in total safety, but if you in Russia or Belarus or Uzbekistan or Turkey or Egypt or Cambodia, and so many other countries, speaking out can mean a death sentence. So we have to set the example. And I want to hear from the witnesses.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask consent that my whole statement be part of the record.

Senator GRAHAM. Without objection.

Senator LEAHY. And I thank you for giving up forum to those who want to speak out in favor of Democracy.  
[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

Mr. Chairman, I want to make one observation before we begin, which is that for the past month or two our staffs have been working daily with their House counterparts to finalize our fiscal year 2017 bill. They are on track to resolving all but the most contentious issues this week.

Then late last Friday we learned that the White House may be proposing a \$2.8 billion cut to our 2017 allocation, as part of an \$18 billion transfer of funding for non-defense operations and programs to the Pentagon.

The proposed cuts are not only arbitrary and indefensible, they suggest that whoever came up with many of them has little idea of what these programs do or what these cuts would mean for our ability to remain engaged as the world's super power.

Three weeks ago we heard testimony from officials of five former Soviet republics that have been subjected to an intensifying pattern of threats, extortion, and, in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, military invasion and occupation by the Russian Government.

At that hearing I remarked that while we have long condemned Russia's attempts to intimidate its neighbors, we have come to appreciate the challenges those countries face even more since we learned of Russia's actions to influence our own presidential election.

Vladimir Putin, that "strong leader" who President Trump admires, has used his power not only to extend Russia's sphere of influence in violation of international law, but to create a kleptocracy that has enabled him and his closest friends to amass enormous personal wealth.

That has been possible because he has simultaneously and systematically sought to silence his critics. Human rights activists and independent journalists have been arrested, physically abused, and sentenced to years in prison on fabricated charges.

Civil society organizations have been harassed, their offices vandalized, their leaders imprisoned and tortured or assassinated.

Even those who were once close to Putin's inner circle have been tracked down and killed, when they exposed corruption and became a liability. The recent assassination of Denis Voronkov in Ukraine is widely suspected of being the work of the Russian Government.

Over the years, we have supported programs to assist civil society organization in Russia, as we have in many countries. We have done so because we recognize the dangers they face, and we know from our own experience the indispensable role that civil society plays in holding governments accountable—the thing President Putin is most afraid of.

Frankly, it is amazing to me that, knowing that the Russian Government can imprison or kill anyone it wants to with impunity, that people like Mr. Kara-Murza have the courage—not only to speak out about corruption—but to come here today after barely surviving an attempt on his life.

It is easy for us to criticize from the safety of where we sit. It is an entirely different thing for people in Russia, Belarus, or Uzbekistan—or in Turkey, Egypt, Cambodia, and so many other countries, where critics of corruption and dictatorship pay with their lives.

The fact that they are willing to risk—and in some cases give—their lives in defense of freedom of speech and democratic, accountable government compels us to do what we can to support and defend them.

Our ability to do so depends, in part, on the example we set.

It does not help when our own President extols the virtues of someone like Vladimir Putin, who has murdered his political opponents and rules like an authoritarian dictator.

It does not help when our own president, who has bragged about his business dealings in Russia—a place where doing business is often synonymous with bribery—refuses to release his tax returns.

It does not help when every week brings new revelations of collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian Government, at a time when Russia was, according to the FBI and our national intelligence agencies, actively seeking to influence our election in favor of candidate Trump.

Nor does it help when many in Congress act as if Russia's interference in our elections is not important, or that falsely accusing President Obama of illegal wiretapping can be treated as a joke.

So at the same time that we provide a forum—like this hearing—for human rights and democracy advocates in Russia and other corrupt, repressive societies, let’s set an example for the way governments should act.

By doing so we would not only provide civil society activists in countries like Russia a model to point to, we would strengthen our own democracy.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, particularly the difference our support makes to them and their organizations and what more we can do.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Mr. Kara-Murza, the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA, VICE CHAIRMAN OF OPEN RUSSIA**

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much, Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, esteemed Members of the subcommittee. Thank you very much for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

This past Sunday, March 26th, marks 17 years since Vladimir Putin was elected President of Russia. It was not, by any means, a flawless election. There were credible reports of ballot-stuffing and serious doubts as to whether Mr. Putin had obtained the 50 percent necessary for victory in the first round. But it was nevertheless the last thing we had that was at least close to a democratic vote. Not a single election held in Russia since then has been assessed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors as free and fair.

Elections have not been the only target of Mr. Putin’s regime. Independent media outlets—especially ones with significant reach—have been silenced through political or economic pressure, or by direct government action. Many of the leading NGOs have been designated as “foreign agents”—which in the Russian language is synonymous with “foreign spies”—under a recent law that targets groups which receive international funding. And these have included the Levada Center polling agency, the vote-monitoring Golos Association, and in what appears to be a calculated insult, Memorial, a human rights group co-founded by Andrei Sakharov.

The courts and law enforcement bodies have long become tools of political repression. According to Memorial, there are currently one hundred political prisoners in our country, a number that is already comparable with the late Soviet period. They include opposition activists and their family members, such as Sergei Udaltsov and Oleg Navalny; regular citizens jailed for participating in peaceful street demonstrations; Ukrainians arrested after the annexation of Crimea, including filmmaker, Oleg Sentsov; as well as Alexey Pichugin, the remaining hostage of the “Yukos case” that saw Russia’s largest oil company dismantled and its CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, imprisoned for more than a decade for having the tenacity to support opposition parties and civil society groups.

Last Sunday, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, tens of thousands of people went out to the streets across Russia, 82 citizen towns across nine time zones from Vladivostok to Leningrad. And I may add that the vast majority of those protesters were young people, people in their twenties and early thirties and their teens, many college students, many high school kids. More than 1,500 people were arrested this past weekend, and there are now indica-

tions that the authorities may be preparing criminal charges against some of the participants.

But there are, of course, worse fates than imprisonment. In the last several years, investigative journalists, opposition figures, human rights activists, anticorruption campaigners, and whistleblowers have met untimely deaths. In what was the most brazen political assassination in Russia in decades, Boris Nemtsov, former deputy prime minister and the most prominent political opponent of Vladimir Putin, was gunned down just 200 yards from the Kremlin. Two years on, none of the organizers or masterminds of this crime have been identified or apprehended. That's complete impunity.

Sometimes are near misses, and one happens to be sitting before you, Mr. Chairman. Twice in the past 2 years—in May of 2015 and just last month, both times in Moscow—I experienced a sudden onset of symptoms consistent with poisoning that led to a multiple organ failure and left me in a coma and on life support. Doctors estimated a chance to survive at about 5 percent. And both times the reason for this poisoning was named as undefined toxin. So I am very fortunate and certainly very grateful to be sitting here today.

But these crackdowns and these repressions are only one side of the story because even in this atmosphere and in spite of it, there are people and organizations in Russia that continue to work to promote and defend human rights, the rule of law, and political freedoms. Our own movement, Open Russia, which was founded by Mr. Khodorkovsky, has launched a number of initiatives aimed at supporting civil society. Our Human Rights Project, for example, provides legal aid to those who face politically motivated prosecution, and in several cases has been successful in keeping activists out of prison.

And I may add that our lawyers have certainly been overwhelmed over this past weekend with the massive arrests of participants of the street demonstrations where they are actively involved in helping those people who have been detained, including activists of Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Open Russia offers financial support to the families of political prisoners who in many cases are left without the main breadwinner. Our Open Media project provides a platform for media startups that cover topics avoided by state news outlets. The Open Russia University is a growing online educational platform that seeks to present an unbiased view of contemporary Russia and create a community of informed citizens. Open Russia's election project is directed at supporting and training a new generation of democratic activists by providing them with opportunities to gain experience in political campaigns and in civic engagement. In fact, most of our work is focused on the young generation, the young people of Russia, the people who will face and who will shape a future post-Putin Russia.

Now, of course, to work towards that post-Putin Russia is our task, task for Russian citizens, needless to say. And contrary to the claims by the Kremlin's propaganda, we never ask the United States for any kind of political support. All we ask is that you are honest about what is happening in Russia.

The statutes of the OSCE, of which both the United States and Russia are full members, stipulate that, and I quote, “Issues relating to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.” We also ask that you stay true to your values and not enable corrupt or abusive behavior.

Little more than 4 years ago this Congress passed a Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, groundbreaking legislation that imposed U.S. visa bans and asset freezes on Russian officials involved in human rights violations. Boris Nemtsov called this law, and I quote, “The most pro-Russian law in the history of any foreign parliament.” Forty-four individuals have now been sanctioned under this law, including one of Mr. Putin’s top lieutenants, General Alexander Bastrykin. We hope that the Magnitsky Act continues to be implemented to its full extent without regard for rank or influence.

While taking a principled stand towards Vladimir Putin’s regime, it is vital for the United States to continue to engage with Russia’s civil society, including: by maintaining public diplomacy programs; developing Russian language media; creating opportunities for direct dialogue and people-to-people exchanges facilitated by special visa regimes, if necessary; and supporting the important work of organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy. This is not only about money. Much more importantly, it is about the message that the United States sends to Russia’s civil society. Do you choose to engage or to turn away?

It is also very important for the United States to appreciate the difference between Vladimir Putin’s regime and Russia. Mr. Putin would certainly like you to equate the two. In fact, one of his closest aides has been on record declaring that, and I quote, “there is no Russia if there is no Putin.”

The Kremlin is trying to portray the sanctions against itself and its actions, for example, in Ukraine as “sanctions on Russia.” Please do not help them to do that. Words are important. The language is important, including the language in the recently introduced Russia Sanctions Review Act of which, Mr. Chairman, I believe you are the lead sponsor. And I think it is essential to make it clear, including in the language of that law, that the United States does not seek to punish the Russian people for the actions of a regime they can neither unseat in a free election or hold accountable through independent media or a legitimate legislature.

Vladimir Putin will not be in power forever. Let us consider the long-term interests and prepare the groundwork for future cooperation between the United States and Russia by maintaining, even in these difficult times, an open, productive, and mutually beneficial dialogue between our peoples and our civil societies.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to any questions you may have.

[CLERK’S NOTE: Mr. Kara-Murza requested that his whole statement and his essay “Answering the Kremlin’s Challenge” be included in the hearing record.]

[The statement and essay follow:]



## PREPARED STATEMENT OF VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, members of the subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing, and for the opportunity to testify before you.

This past Sunday, March 26, marked 17 years since Vladimir Putin was elected president of Russia. It was not a flawless election—there were credible reports of ballot-stuffing and serious doubts about whether Mr. Putin had obtained the 50 percent required for a first-round victory—but it was the last thing we had that was at least close to a democratic vote.<sup>1</sup> Not a single election held in Russia since then has been assessed by OSCE monitors as free and fair.<sup>2</sup>

Elections have not been the only target of Mr. Putin’s regime. Independent media outlets—especially ones with significant reach—have been silenced through political or economic pressure, or by direct government action. Many of the leading NGOs have been designated as “foreign agents”—which in Russian is synonymous with “foreign spies”—under a law targeting groups that receive international funding. These include the Levada Center polling agency, the vote-monitoring Golos Association, and—in what appears to be a calculated insult—*Memorial*, a human rights group co-founded by Andrei Sakharov.<sup>3</sup>

The courts and law enforcement bodies have become tools of political repression. According to *Memorial*, there are currently one-hundred political prisoners in our country, a number comparable with the late Soviet period.<sup>4</sup> They include opposition activists and their family members, such as Sergei Udaltsov and Oleg Navalny; regular citizens jailed for participating in peaceful demonstrations; Ukrainians arrested after the annexation of Crimea, including filmmaker Oleg Sentsov; as well as Alexei Pichugin, the remaining hostage of the “Yukos case” that saw Russia’s largest oil company dismantled and its CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, imprisoned for more than a decade for having the tenacity to support opposition parties and civil society groups.

Last Sunday, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets across the country to protest against government corruption. More than 1,500 people were arrested, and there are indications that the authorities may be preparing criminal charges against some of the participants.<sup>5</sup>

But there are worse fates than imprisonment. In the last several years, investigative journalists, opposition figures, human rights activists, anticorruption campaigners, and whistleblowers have met untimely deaths. In the most brazen political assassination in decades, Boris Nemtsov—former deputy prime minister and the most prominent opponent of Vladimir Putin—was gunned down two-hundred yards from the Kremlin. The organizers and masterminds of this crime have not been identified or apprehended.

Sometimes, there are near-misses—and one happens to be sitting before you. Twice in the past 2 years—in May 2015 and in February 2017, both times in Moscow—I experienced a sudden onset of symptoms consistent with poisoning that led to multiple organ failure and left me in a coma and on life-support. The official diagnosis was “toxic action by an undefined substance.” Both times doctors assessed my chances of survival at about 5 percent, so I am very fortunate—and very grateful—to be here today.

But these crackdowns and repressions are only one side of the story. Because even in this atmosphere—and in spite of it—there are people and organizations that continue to work to promote and defend human rights, political freedoms, and the rule of law in Russia. Our movement, Open Russia, founded by Mr. Khodorkovsky, has launched a number of initiatives aimed at supporting civil society. Our Human Rights Project provides legal aid to those who face politically motivated prosecution, and in several cases has been successful in keeping activists out of prison.<sup>6</sup> Open Russia offers financial support to the families of political prisoners. Our Open Media project provides a platform for media startups that raise awareness of the issues

<sup>1</sup>“And the Winner Is?” *The Moscow Times*, September 9, 2000 <http://old.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/2000/9/article/and-the-winner-is/258951.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Elections in Russia, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia>.

<sup>3</sup>Register of Foreign Agent NGOs, Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (*in Russian*) <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup>Current List of Russian Political Prisoners, Memorial Human Rights Center (*in Russian*) <http://memohrc.org/pzk-list>.

<sup>5</sup>“Against Dimon and Corruption”, Radio Svoboda, March 26, 2017 (*in Russian*) <http://www.svoboda.org/a/28391550.html>.

<sup>6</sup>Open Russia Human Rights Project. 2016 Report (*in Russian*) <https://pravo.openrussia.org/otchet-2016/>.

avoided by state-run news outlets.<sup>7</sup> The Open Russia University is a growing online educational platform that seeks to present an unbiased view of contemporary Russia and create a community of informed citizens.<sup>8</sup> Open Russia’s election project is directed at supporting and training a new generation of democratic activists by providing them with opportunities to gain experience in political campaigns and civic engagement.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, most of our work is directed at the new generation, the young people—people who will shape the future post-Putin Russia.

To work toward that post-Putin Russia is a task for Russian citizens. Contrary to claims by the Kremlin’s propaganda, we never ask the United States for any political support. All we ask is that you are honest about what is happening in Russia. The statutes of the OSCE—of which both the U.S. and Russia are members—stipulate that “issues relating to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law . . . are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”<sup>10</sup> We also ask that you stay true to your values and not enable abusive or corrupt behavior. More than 4 years ago, this Congress passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act—groundbreaking legislation that imposed U.S. visa bans and asset freezes on Russian officials involved in human rights violations. Boris Nemtsov called it “the most pro-Russian law in the history of any foreign parliament.”<sup>11</sup> Forty-four individuals have been sanctioned under this law, including one of Mr. Putin’s top lieutenants, General Alexander Bastrykin.<sup>12</sup> We hope that the Magnitsky Act continues to be implemented to its full extent, without regard for rank or influence.

While taking a principled stand toward Vladimir Putin’s regime, it is vital for the U.S. to continue to engage with Russia’s civil society—including by maintaining public diplomacy programs; developing Russian-language media; creating opportunities for direct dialogue and people-to-people exchanges facilitated by special visa regimes, if necessary; and supporting the important work of organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy. This is not only about money. Much more importantly, it is about the message that the U.S. sends to Russia’s civil society. Do you choose to engage or turn away?

It is also very important for the United States to appreciate the difference between Vladimir Putin’s regime and Russia. Mr. Putin would certainly like you to equate the two. One of his close aides declared that “there is no Russia . . . if there is no Putin.”<sup>13</sup> The Kremlin is trying to portray sanctions against itself and its actions, for example, in Ukraine as “sanctions on Russia.” Please don’t help them. Words are important—including the words in the recently introduced Russia Sanctions Review Act. It is essential to make it clear that the United States does not seek to punish the Russian people for the actions of a regime they can neither unseat in a free election nor hold to account through independent media or a legitimate legislature.

Vladimir Putin will not be in power forever. Let us consider the long-term interests and prepare the groundwork for future cooperation between the United States and Russia by maintaining—even in these difficult times—an open, productive, and mutually beneficial dialogue between our peoples and our civil societies.

<sup>7</sup> Open Media (*in Russian*) <https://openrussia.org/media/704056/>.

<sup>8</sup> Open Russia University (*in Russian*) <https://openuni.io>.

<sup>9</sup> Open Elections (*in Russian*) <https://ov.openrussia.org>.

<sup>10</sup> CSCE/OSCE Moscow Document <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14310?download=true>.

<sup>11</sup> Testimony by the Hon. Boris Nemtsov, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2013 [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Nemtsov\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Nemtsov_Testimony.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/SDN-List/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>13</sup> “No Putin, No Russia,” Says Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff”, *The Moscow Times*, October 23, 2014 <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/no-putin-no-russia-says-kremlin-deputy-chief-of-staff-40702>.

## ESSAY

[From World Affairs Online Features]

## ANSWERING THE KREMLIN'S CHALLENGE

(by Vladimir Kara-Murza)



On December 20, 1991, NATO foreign ministers gathered at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels for talks with diplomats from the former Warsaw Pact countries were caught by surprise as the (still) Soviet ambassador, Nikolai Afanasievsky, began reading out a letter from Russian President Boris Yeltsin to NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner. "We consider these relations [with NATO] to be very serious and wish to develop this dialogue in each and every direction, both on the political and military levels," wrote the Russian leader who, five days later, would take control of Moscow's nuclear arsenal and its permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics formally went out of existence. Yeltsin's letter continued: "Today we are raising the question of Russia's membership in NATO." Unlike the sham Soviet application to join the alliance in 1954, this one was clearly made in good faith, coming a few months after Russian citizens defiantly—and definitively—rejected the old regime, going out in the hundreds of thousands to the streets of Moscow to stand in the way of an attempted hardline coup d'état.

A quarter-century later, this reads almost like fiction. Russia's official national security strategy, signed by President Vladimir Putin, describes the "bankruptcy of the regional system of security . . . built on the basis of NATO and the European Union" and designates NATO actions, including its "military activation, its continued expansion, the approach of its military infrastructure to Russian borders" as "a threat to [Russian] national security." Russia's dramatically stepped-up military exercise schedule has included simulated nuclear attacks on NATO member states and allies such as Sweden. In its updated military doctrine, the Kremlin *has* lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons, while Mr. Putin has openly and offhandedly discussed his readiness to push the "nuclear button," which his Soviet predecessors had never threatened in public even in the tensest moments of the Cold War.

In 2014, Vladimir Putin undertook the first state-to-state territorial annexation in Europe since the Second World War, seizing Crimea from Ukraine, and launched

an unannounced but very real war against his neighbor, sending weapons, money, and even regular Russian troops to back the ostensibly “separatist” uprising in Ukraine’s two easternmost regions. Mr. Putin’s more overtly hostile acts toward NATO countries have included withdrawing from the U.S.—Russia agreement on the disposal of surplus weapons-grade plutonium, and positioning nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles in Russia’s Kaliningrad enclave, putting them in range of Lithuania and Poland, and, potentially, parts of Germany, including Berlin. In Syria, he has so brazenly opposed Washington in the civil war that will decide the fate of his ally, Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, that experts discuss what to do in the event of a “hot war” incident between U.S. and Russian forces.

Meanwhile, at home, Mr. Putin has portrayed his regime as the antithesis of the “declining” West and a bulwark of “traditional values,” while dramatizing its military and foreign policy adventurism as evidence of a Russia “rising from its knees” after the “humiliation” of the 1990s. The state propaganda machine has, for years now, been tuned to attacking Russia’s supposed enemies in the West, with Dmitri Kiselev, the most recognizable face on the Kremlin television networks and Mr. Putin’s propaganda spin master, infamously boasting on-air about Russia’s ability to “turn the United States into radioactive ash.”

How and why could such a geopolitical volte-face by a major world power—from seeking membership in NATO to confronting it—have occurred? To answer this question is important not only for finding ways to respond to Mr. Putin’s challenges to the Euro-Atlantic community, but also for identifying the lessons that both future Russian leaders and the West should keep in mind when Russia makes its eventual post-Putin transition.

In fact, this coming volte-face had been foreseen—and dramatically highlighted—very early on. On December 14, 1992, at a meeting of foreign ministers from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Stockholm, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, the face of Moscow’s pro-European foreign policy under President Yeltsin, took the floor to denounce NATO and EU efforts to “strengthen their military presence in the Baltic States and other regions of the former USSR.” Mr. Kozyrev called former Soviet republics “a post-imperial space where Russia has to defend its interests by all available means, including military and economic ones,” and where “CSCE norms cannot be fully implemented.” As Western diplomats in the audience looked on in disbelief, and U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger rushed to request an urgent meeting with Mr. Kozyrev, the Russian foreign minister approached the podium once again—this time, to explain that his speech had been a stunt intended to focus attention on what could happen if President Yeltsin’s political opponents among the nationalists and Communists centered around the Congress of People’s Deputies were to prevail in the domestic power struggle.

As it turned out, Boris Yeltsin won, but then, just a few short years later, handed the keys to his Kremlin office, along with the Russian nuclear codes, to an officer of the very same organization—the KGB—he had so dramatically defeated in August 1991. Mr. Yeltsin’s preferred successor in the Kremlin—as the Russian president himself made clear on several occasions—was the young reformist governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region by the name of Boris Nemtsov, whom he brought to Moscow in the late 1990s as first deputy prime minister. History chose otherwise. And as so often happened in Russian history, a turn toward authoritarianism at home was followed by a matching shift in relations with the outside world, especially with the democracies of the West.

The domestic political changes in the early years of Mr. Putin’s presidency were remarkable. Having inherited a flawed and problem-ridden but fundamentally democratic political system—with a pluralistic parliament, competitive elections, and a multitude of media voices, including on national television—the onetime KGB operative quickly reshaped it in accordance with his professional and political upbringing, meeting little resistance at home and even less internationally. Starting with symbolic acts that should have warned those who were willing to notice—such as reinstating the Soviet-era national anthem first introduced by Stalin, and a memorial plaque to his mentor Yuri Andropov (Soviet KGB chairman best known for establishing a special directorate tasked with suppressing dissent and authorizing the practice of committing dissidents to psychiatric asylums) Mr. Putin proceeded with practical steps aimed at cementing his authority. One by one, he took over or shut down independent television networks; curtailed the rights of the regions and abolished direct elections for regional governors; turned the judiciary and law enforcement into tools for punishing his opponents—the best-known case being that of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia’s richest man who had the tenacity to support opposition parties and paid for it with a 10-year prison sentence—and fixed elections to cleanse the Russian parliament of all genuine opposition, turning it into a

rubberstamp—“not a place for discussion,” in the unforgettable words of its own former speaker. Russians who dared to oppose Mr. Putin’s regime and its policies were denounced as “national traitors” who spend time “scavenging at foreign embassies,” as Mr. Putin himself put it. Russian nongovernmental organizations that did not toe the official line—including the Levada Center, the country’s leading independent pollster, and Memorial, a human rights group founded by Andrei Sakharov—were labeled “foreign agents” (which in Russian is synonymous with “foreign spies”) under one of the multitude of new repressive laws introduced by the Kremlin.

Such a political climate—and the accompanying vision of Russia as a “besieged fortress” surrounded by enemies—inevitably meant a reassessment of the country’s place in the world and a reinterpretation of its own recent history. Defying not only geography, but also centuries of history, culture, and religious identity, the Russian government declared, in an official strategy adopted by the culture ministry, that “Russia is not Europe.” The peaceful dissolution of the USSR in 1991 was no longer considered an act of liberation for Russia and other former Soviet republics, but, in Mr. Putin’s own words, as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century” (presumably greater than the Holocaust, Communist terror, and two of the most destructive wars in the history of mankind.)

The 1990s were no longer seen as a difficult but necessary period of democratic transition, but as the decade when Russia was brought to its knees by the West and its political pawns inside the country. Western countries themselves—the United States chief among them—were no longer considered Russia’s natural allies, but adversaries determined to contain, weaken, and dismember Russia; those who “think that Russia . . . is still a threat, and this threat has to be eliminated” and use terrorism as “an instrument to achieve these goals,” as Vladimir Putin astonishingly claimed after the 2004 terrorist attack in Beslan.

Under this “zero-sum” mindset, measures that serve to weaken or destabilize the assumed adversaries are not only acceptable, but necessary—even if they involve direct political interference, from the quite open multimillion-euro loan given to France’s far-right *Front national* party—one of Mr. Putin’s closest political allies in Western Europe—through the Moscow-based First Czech Russian Bank in 2014 to the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails during the 2016 U.S. election campaign. Political behavior by neighboring governments that was considered hostile has been met with outright force—such as the military incursion into Georgia in 2008, or the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the *de facto* war against Ukraine in the Donbass. Given the historical, linguistic, religious, and cultural proximity between Russia and Ukraine, a corrupt Ukrainian strongman forced out of power by mass protests on the streets of the capital was a scenario too close for comfort for Vladimir Putin—especially after the scare of Russia’s own “winter of protest” in 2011 and 2012. The success of the Maidan in Kiev had to be stopped to prevent a Maidan in Moscow—by whatever means necessary. The shock about the Kremlin’s assault on Ukraine felt in many Western capitals was naïve: why would a government that violates its own laws and tramples on the rights of its own citizens be expected to respect other countries or follow international norms?

It would be inaccurate to blame the West for Russia’s political turnaround in the last quarter-century. The lion’s share of responsibility lies within Russia itself, above all with its post-Soviet political elite that failed to match the genuine popular enthusiasm for democracy in the early 1990s with a political strategy that would have allowed Russia to fully come to terms with, and turn the page on, its totalitarian past. Unlike other countries in eastern Europe, Russia never underwent anything resembling a lustration process that would have made it impossible for an operative of the Soviet security services to ever achieve a position of power. Some of the old regime’s archives were opened—but not fully, and not for long. The Communist party was declared by Russia’s highest court to have been responsible for “the policies of repression directed at millions”—but no consequences followed. The Soviet system remained only half-condemned, while the hardships that accompanied the often half-hearted and inconsistent market reforms, and the unhealthy influence that financial “oligarchs” exercised over elected officials helped discredit the very notion of democracy among the general population. Mr. Putin’s revanchistpropaganda fell on fertile ground. Those who will shape Russia’s next democratic transition would be wise to learn the lessons.

But so would the leaders of Western democracies. Because they, too, share some of the responsibility for Russia’s failed transition in the 1990s—and its renewed authoritarianism at the start of the new century. For most countries that underwent a successful post-Communist transformation it was, as Václav Havel put it, “a return to Europe”—the prospect of becoming full members in the Euro-Atlantic community—that served as the leading incentive for reform, allowing them to brave ad-

versities and make difficult choices. Such a prospect was never seriously offered to Russia. “The question of Russia’s membership in NATO” raised by President Yeltsin in December 1991 was met with silence. And, although Russia was admitted into the Council of Europe (which today gives Russian citizens their only recourse to real justice, through the European Court of Human Rights,) membership in the European Union—theoretically open to any European country that fulfills the “Copenhagen criteria” on rule of law, democracy, and a functioning market economy—was never offered to Mr. Yeltsin’s Russia even as a distant possibility. Such an approach not only denied Russia’s political elites a crucial motivation to implement reforms, but also lent credence to Mr. Putin’s subsequent claim that the West was unwilling to accept Russia as a partner, even when its political system was in line with Western values.

The West was, however, more than willing to accept Vladimir Putin. To the bewilderment of many in Russia who had noticed the early warning signs, leaders of the Group of Eight embraced Mr. Putin, it seemed, more eagerly than they ever did his democratic predecessor. As if trying to correct their initial mistake of not opening the door to Russia’s democracy in the 1990s, they made a second one—this time, by appearing to give a nod of approval to its newly emerging authoritarianism. Mr. Putin’s first steps in that direction were cautious and mindful of potential reaction, particularly from fellow member states in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which includes Russia, the U.S., and all European Union countries, and whose statutes clearly state that “issues relating to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law . . . are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned.”

No such “legitimate concern” was forthcoming from the West, however. On the contrary: just weeks after an early-dawn raid on the studios of NTV, the country’s largest private broadcaster, transferred it to state control—and months after the reinstatement of Stalin’s national anthem and the curtailing of the independence of the upper house of Parliament— U.S. President George W. Bush, standing beside Mr. Putin, famously declared that he had “looked the man in the eye... [and] was able to get a sense of his soul.” That same year, in 2001, Mr. Bush praised Mr. Putin as “a new style of leader, a reformer, a man who loves his country as much as I love mine . . . a man who is going to make a huge difference in making the world more peaceful by working closely with the United States.” The self-delusion was not confined to the White House. In June 2003, days after the Kremlin pulled the plug on Russia’s last independent national television channel, the British government treated Mr. Putin to a lavish royal reception at the London Guildhall—not too far from the spot where, 3 years later, agents likely acting on Kremlin orders would poison FSB defector Alexander Litvinenko with radioactive polonium.

Mr. Putin can be forgiven for getting the wrong message. And, while one would be hard-pressed to find many areas of agreement between the administration of George W. Bush and that of his successor Barack Obama, their attitude toward Mr. Putin demonstrated remarkable bipartisan continuity. Mr. Obama began his presidency with a “reset” in relations with the Kremlin, once again prioritizing tactical deals over principles. Perhaps the most grotesque illustration of that policy came in March 2012. As tens of thousands of people gathered in downtown Moscow to protest Mr. Putin’s declared victory in an election characterized by what OSCE observers called a lack of “real competition” and “abuse of government resources,” the State Department announced that “the United States congratulates the Russian people on the completion of the presidential elections, and looks forward to working with the president-elect.”

Recognizing the short-sightedness of its past willingness to sacrifice values for the sake of realpolitik would be a good starting point for the Euro-Atlantic community to reassess its attitude toward Vladimir Putin. To some extent, this began in 2014. A forcible change of borders in Europe achieved what repressions against the opposition, the muzzling of the media, and the successive rigging of elections could not. Mr. Putin has been disinvited from Group of Eight meetings; extensive sanctions, both individual and sectoral, have been imposed by U.S. and EU governments; and Western leaders have stopped pretending that the Kremlin strongman is a fellow democrat—although, from time to time, we still hear influential voices calling for a return to “business as usual.” There is a growing appreciation in capitals around the globe that the Kremlin’s domestic behavior and its international conduct are inextricably linked—and that nothing will change until Mr. Putin’s regime is replaced by a democratic government.

That task, of course, must be undertaken by Russian citizens alone. Yet, while outsiders should not attempt to shape political events inside Russia, neither should they enable Mr. Putin and his kleptocrats by providing safe harbor for their illicit

gains. For the many striking parallels between the Soviet system and the current regime in Russia—from political prisoners to media censorship—there is also a crucial difference: while they were persecuting dissenters and engaging in anti-Western propaganda, members of the Soviet Politburo did not store their money in Western banks, send their children to Western schools, or invest in luxurious real estate in Western countries. Those who rule Russia today treat their citizens in ways expected of third-world dictatorships, but choose the freedoms and protections of the West when it comes to their own families and their ill-gotten money. This hypocrisy must stop. Those who trample on the free world’s most basic norms should not be allowed to enjoy its economic and political privileges. Western democracies should not serve as havens for Mr. Putin’s crooks and human rights abusers. Telling such people that they and their money are not welcome would be a strong message of solidarity to those in Russia who continue, at great personal risk, to work for a democratic future in our country.

In 2012, the U.S. Congress sent such a message by passing a groundbreaking law that, for the first time, introduced personal accountability for human rights violations. The Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act—named after a Russian lawyer who was arrested and tortured to death in prison after uncovering a tax fraud scheme involving government officials—banned Russian human rights abusers from receiving U.S. visas and owning U.S. assets. Boris Nemtsov, the late leader of the Russian opposition, described the Magnitsky Act as “the most pro-Russian law ever passed by a foreign parliament” because it was directed against those who abuse the rights of Russian citizens and plunder money from Russian taxpayers. For years, however, the potential consequences of the Act were limited by timid implementation, with only low-level abusers targeted by its provisions. The unspoken “glass ceiling” was broken in January 2017 by the outgoing Obama administration when it decided to blacklist General Alexander Bastrykin, one of Mr. Putin’s closest confidants who, as head of Russia’s Investigative Committee, was in charge of a slate of politically motivated criminal prosecutions, including those against the Bolotnaya Square protesters, and who once personally threatened to murder a leading independent journalist.

It also took years for Europe to follow. In December 2016, Estonia, a tiny former Soviet republic on Russia’s northwestern border, had the tenacity to become the first European Union member state to introduce its own Magnitsky law. Two months later, the United Kingdom—long a favored destination for Kremlin kleptocrats and thus the most important country in this regard— took a decisive step as its House of Commons approved a bill allowing courts to freeze the assets of people who have profited from corruption and human rights abuse. “This measure would send a clear statement that the UK will not . . . allow those who have committed gross abuse or violations around the world to launder their money here,” Ben Wallace, Britain’s security minister, affirmed before the vote. It is essential that other European countries move in the same direction if the West is to become serious about defending the principles it claims to espouse.

To this end—it truly is better late than never—the international community should hold the Kremlin accountable not only for its unlawful actions abroad, but also for its continuing violations of the rule of law and human rights at home, which constitute clear breaches of Russia’s commitments under its membership of the OSCE and the Council of Europe in such areas as freedom of the media, election standards, or due process. The latter has been clearly problematic in the official investigation into the assassination of Mr. Nemtsov, who was gunned down in February 2015 two-hundred yards from the Kremlin wall. Although the alleged perpetrators have been arrested and put on trial, the Russian Investigative Committee is unable or unwilling to pursue those who had ordered and organized the killing—for example, not even once questioning Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-appointed head of Chechnya with evident links to the accused gunmen. The Russian authorities must not be allowed to sweep this investigation under the carpet. The necessary questions must be asked, including publicly, through all available bilateral and multilateral mechanisms.

The Kremlin’s aggressive “propaganda war” must be countered, among other ways by the development of quality independent media in the Russian language that would provide objective information to Russians both inside and outside the country. In 2015, while holding the rotating EU presidency, the government of Latvia put forward a proposal to establish a Europe-wide Russian-language television channel, but the idea did not win backing from other EU states.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin continues to pump substantial resources into RT, its English-language broadcasting outlet that is widely available (if not widely watched) in Europe and North America.

Standards should be maintained when it comes to parliamentary diplomacy. Members of the current Russian legislature, who owe their seats to an election in 2016 that—like all national elections in Russia since 2003—fell far short of acceptable democratic standards, should not be welcomed as bona fide members in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Not because they represent Russia—but because they do not represent it.

This distinction is crucial for the success or failure of Russia's future transition—and Western leaders should make it explicitly and clearly. Too often, they rhetorically equate Mr. Putin with Russia, condemning “actions by Russia” or “the position of Russia” when they mean actions and positions of an unelected authoritarian regime in the Kremlin. This may seem like a trivial point—but when the U.S. President or the German chancellor refer to restrictions imposed on individuals or entities connected with the aggression against Ukraine as “sanctions on Russia,” they unwittingly do the bidding of Mr. Putin's propaganda. The Euro-Atlantic community should be careful to avoid the appearance of blaming the people of Russia for the actions of a regime they can neither unseat in a democratic election nor hold accountable through independent media or a legitimate legislature. On the contrary: while standing firm on principles in dealing with Vladimir Putin, Western governments should make it clear that a future democratic Russia will be welcomed as an equal partner both in the world and in Europe, and will reclaim its rightful seat at the table by returning to the Group of Eight and—should its people and its elected leaders choose—by joining the Euro-Atlantic institutions. In short, Russia should be treated for what it is—a European county, fundamentally no different from its neighbors that, until recently, also lived under non-democratic regimes but were able to “return to Europe.”

In the spring of 1989, shortly before a succession of “velvet revolutions” would sweep through the countries of central and eastern Europe, liberating them from Soviet-style regimes and culminating in Russia's own democratic revolution in August 1991, U.S. President George H. W. Bush took the podium at the Rheingoldhalle in Mainz, West Germany, to lay out his vision for a coming era. “For forty years, the world has waited for the cold war to end. And decade after decade, time after time, the flowering human spirit withered from the chill of conflict and oppression; and again, the world waited,” Mr. Bush declared. “But the passion for freedom cannot be denied forever. The world has waited long enough. The time is right. Let Europe be whole and free.”

In the ensuing quarter-century, the progress toward this goal must surely have surpassed the boldest dreams of the cold-war generation of Western leaders. Despite the many remaining difficulties, democracy and cooperation have succeeded where there were once dictatorships fenced off by an “iron curtain.” But the job is not yet done. A Europe “whole and free” will only become a reality once Europe's two largest nations—Russia and Ukraine—take their places within it. That day will come. Such is the logic of history. But those who are entrusted with political responsibility in the current generation should do all they can to bring that day a little closer.

*The author is vice chairman of Open Russia, a Russian pro-democracy movement.*

*This essay will appear in an upcoming World Affairs book collection on transatlantic challenges.*

Senator GRAHAM. Would you like to introduce your wife? I know she has suffered through a lot.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. You have Evgenia Kara-Murza. This is my wife and please stand up while I am introducing you. And it is really—it really has been much more difficult for her than it has been for—I do not remember much when I was in a coma. In fact, I remember nothing, but she had to bear the brunt of it, so I am very grateful to have her in my life and to have her here.

Senator GRAHAM. We are honored to have you both.

**STATEMENT OF LAURA JEWETT, REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR EURASIA PROGRAMS, NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

LAURA JEWETT. Thank you. Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, Members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before this subcommittee and to sit on a panel with Jan Surotchak



and Vladimir Kara-Murza. Vladimir personifies courage. He is also a hard act to follow.

I will share with you some on the ground perspectives on the homegrown repression as well as the cross-border authoritarian aggression we are seeing in Eurasia. I will also share thoughts on how the international community can best respond.

The fundamental point is that Russia's hybrid warfare in Eurasia poses an urgent threat, not just to the countries of Eurasia, but also to the security of Europe and the United States. This kind of warfare is potentially more powerful than warships and missiles because if successful, the aggressor can deprive another country of its sovereignty without seizing territory. We ignore this threat at our peril.

It is particularly fitting that this subcommittee is holding this hearing on Russia's role in the region, since one of the longstanding messages emanating from Moscow is the distortion and discrediting of international democracy assistance in Eurasia. So when we hear calls over here to cut this assistance, using arguments that are similar to Moscow's, the sources and the motives should be questioned.

We also have to be alert to false equivalencies. One of the tropes of Russian propaganda is to equate its own hybrid warfare with democracy assistance, as though there is moral equivalence between two doctors, one prescribing medicine, the other administering poison. The purpose of democracy assistance around elections, for example, is to promote citizens' fundamental right to express their political will freely. It is not about who wins, but who gets to decide.

This is the sovereign right of the country's citizens as affirmed in the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and the founding documents of the OSCE, among other international agreements.

Russian electoral interference, on the other hand, is a violation of citizens' rights to choose their own representatives. By design, it pollutes political discourse, undermines confidence in the process, and tips the scales through subterfuge. It's a violation of sovereignty whether or not it impacts the final vote count. To give credence to these distortions is to abet authoritarian aggression.

Let me share with you some very brief examples of how this authoritarian aggression plays out on the ground in Eurasia. And I urge you to read the testimony submitted by Evgenia Chirikova from Russia, Anar Mammadli from Azerbaijan, Eka Gigauri, Ana Natsvlishvili, and Giorgi Oniani from Georgia, and Mustafa Nayyem and Svitlana Zalishchuk from Ukraine. These unflinching democracy activists paint a clear picture of the costs that Russia's authoritarian aggression is imposing on their countries. They also give a preview of what to expect further in the West.

[CLERK'S NOTE: The testimonies submitted by Evgenia Chirikova, Anar Mammadli, Eka Gigauri, Ana Natsvlishvili, Giorgi Oniani, Mustafa Nayyem, and Svitlana Zalishchuk appear after Laura Jewett's prepared statement.]

Evgenia Chirikova organized peaceful demonstrations in Russia to defend a forest from construction of a highway. She was arrested multiple times and child protection authorities threatened to take her children away from her, forcing her to leave Russia. Yet she

continues her activism from abroad. She will tell you that hundreds of grassroots organizations also continue their activism inside the country and we saw evidence of this during the demonstrations this past weekend.

Note that international organizations working in Russia have been vilified and shut down as part of the longstanding assault on democracy assistance, which only serves to isolate Russian activists from their peers around the world.

Anar Mammadli heads a nonpartisan citizen election monitoring group in Azerbaijan. Anar will tell you that Azerbaijan's repressive techniques are not necessarily imposed from Russia, but they're borrowed quite willingly. When his group reported on fraud in 2013 elections, he was arrested and served two and a half years in prison. More than a hundred other political prisoners remain behind bars, yet Anar and many other activists continue to defend democracy and human rights in the face of these risks.

Georgia's foreign policy is Western oriented and most Georgians aspire to a democratic and European future, which explains why Russia invaded Georgia and continues to occupy 20 percent of its territory, to frustrate these goals. Yet the influence of Russian propaganda in Georgia is palpable. One narrative holds that embracing Europe will force Georgians to violate their traditional values. Another is that if Georgia does stray too far toward the West, it will face further military consequences from Moscow.

These messages have taken root and they distort politics. To Georgia's credit though, it is home to vibrant civil society groups that are pushing back against this interference.

Ukraine has served as a laboratory for every weapon of hybrid warfare, precisely because an independent and democratic Ukraine would impact the rest of the region profoundly. The prevailing false narrative in Ukraine is that Ukraine is deeply divided between those who support fascism and those desperate to be rescued by Russia. But NDI's public opinion research paints actually the opposite picture. Ukrainians are united on the big issues facing their country. Eighty percent say it is important that Ukraine become a fully functioning democracy. Only 4 percent consider Russia's influence on their country positive. Eighty percent say they would not accept peace in exchange for losing the right to determine their own future.

Ukraine's reforms are being driven from the bottom up and Ukrainians are committed to these reforms and optimistic about the future. In other words, hybrid warfare is meeting real resistance in Ukraine and international assistance is falling on fertile soil.

The international community should think in terms of four baskets of responses to hybrid warfare. We need to reaffirm our transatlantic alliances and our commitment to democratic principles. We need to strengthen democratic institutions in the affected countries. Third, governments and political leaders need to develop proactive and whole-of-government counterstrategies. And, fourth, citizens, civic groups, political parties, and journalists need information, tools, and strategies so they can protect themselves and each other.

The Ukrainian experience shows that it is possible to defend against a military invasion and hybrid warfare while still building

democracy, but the Ukrainians and other democracy champions around the region cannot do it alone, nor should they. The tools of hybrid warfare being tested in Eurasia today will be deployed on our own shores tomorrow. We are already experiencing this. Democracy assistance as a defense against authoritarian aggression in Eurasia is an essential investment in sovereignty, stability, and global security.

[The statements follow:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAURA JEWETT

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to share with you some reflections on the impact that authoritarian aggression is having on civil society in Eurasia, as well as on the responses that activists in the region are undertaking and the kinds of support they would welcome.

It is an honor to testify before this subcommittee and to represent a panel that includes Jan Surotchak from our sister organization, IRI, and Vladimir Kara-Murza. Vladimir personifies courage. His integrity and determination in fighting for democracy, at great personal cost, are an inspiration to so many around the world, myself included.

It is particularly fitting that this subcommittee is holding this hearing on Russia's role in the region, in that one of the messages emanating from Moscow for many years has been the distortion and discrediting of international democracy assistance in Eurasia. So when there are calls to cut democracy assistance—using language and arguments that echo narratives coming from Moscow—the motives should be questioned. Are there genuine concerns about the proper use of funds? Or is it a tactic that wittingly or unwittingly plays into a larger scheme to undermine challenges to authoritarian rule throughout the region?

It is critical that we distinguish clearly between our own democratic values and another country's hostile efforts to have us abandon those principles. To give credence to Russian Government narratives about democracy assistance, in particular, would be to abet authoritarian aggression.

#### HYBRID WARFARE

The U.S. intelligence community and many other analysts have described in detail how the Russian regime is pursuing the suppression of fundamental freedoms at home matched by “hybrid warfare” abroad. This hybrid warfare encompasses propaganda and misinformation; espionage; cyberattacks; corruption as a tool for buying influence; financing of political parties, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions; coercive economic measures; and covert and overt military actions. These efforts fan the flames of broader anti-democratic trends, such as extreme polarization, xenophobia, and isolationism, while simultaneously exploiting the fundamental characteristics of open societies, such as political rivalry and competition, free press and speech, and unrestricted social media. They aim to tear down democratic institutions.

The tactics of hybrid warfare picked up momentum in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea and have spread more recently to Western Europe and the U.S. But they have been standard operating procedure throughout Eurasia for more than 15 years.

#### DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL SECURITY

This authoritarian aggression poses urgent threats—not just to the sovereignty and stability of the countries being targeted, but also to global democracy and security. We ignore it at our peril.

In this interconnected and interdependent world, what happens for good or for bad within the borders of states has regional and, sometimes, global impact. At a basic level, we have a direct interest in how people live and how they are treated by their governments.

We are not alone in this enterprise. Over the past three decades, nongovernmental groups around the world, other governments and intergovernmental organizations have joined the effort to promote and sustain open, responsive and accountable governance, along with citizen engagement.

Our ultimate foreign policy goal is a world that is secure, stable, humane and safe, where the risk of war is minimal. Yet the reality is that hotspots most likely to erupt into violence are found, for the most part, in areas of the world that are

nondemocratic—places that have been defined by the Defense Department as the “arc of instability.” These are places that experience ethnic conflict and civil war, they generate refugee flows across borders, they are places where terrorists and traffickers are harbored. The international community has rightly worked to restore order by helping to establish a democratic framework for governance in a number of these countries. The response has not always been entirely successful, but on the whole, the introduction of democratic processes and citizen engagement has made these countries less dangerous than they had been. The cost for the United States in that effort has been small. Foreign assistance is only about 1 percent of the total U.S. budget, and democracy assistance represents just 4 percent of our foreign aid.

As Tom Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment points out, “In most of the dozens of countries where the United States is employing diplomatic, economic, and assistance measures to support potential or struggling democratic transitions—from Cambodia, Indonesia, and Mongolia to El Salvador, Kenya, Nigeria, and Venezuela—such efforts align closely with and serve a critical array of unquestionably hard interests. These include limiting the strategic reach of the United States’ autocratic rivals, fighting terrorism, reducing international drug trafficking, and undercutting drivers of massive refugee flows.”

The ‘hard interests’ in Eurasia demand a commitment to democracy assistance as a minimal response to hybrid warfare and authoritarian aggression in the region.

#### FALSE EQUIVALENCIES

False equivalencies are a common distraction technique in misinformation campaigns. Thus, one of the tropes of authoritarian propaganda is an equation between hostile external pressure on the one hand and good-faith international assistance on the other. In this warped view, meddling in other countries’ sovereign political processes is fair game since it shares some superficial characteristics with democracy assistance. As though there is moral equivalence between two doctors—one of whom prescribes medicine and the other of whom administers poison—because they both attended to the patient. But make no mistake: democracy assistance has absolutely nothing in common with authoritarian aggression.

Take elections as an example. Russian electoral interference has included, among other tactics, the hacking, theft and broadcasting of private data; deliberate distribution of false news and misinformation; malicious trolling; blackmail and discrediting of targets; and manipulation of voter registries or results tabulation. By design, it pollutes political discourse, undermines public confidence in the process, and tips the scales through subterfuge. It corrodes the electoral environment regardless of whether it impacts the ultimate vote count. It is a violation of citizens’ sovereign right to freely choose their own representatives. These forms of electoral interference are a weapon that is potentially more powerful than warships or missiles. The aggressor can deprive the opposing side of its sovereignty without seizing territory.

Democracy assistance around elections could not be more different. Consider the electoral environment in authoritarian countries. Opposition political parties are harassed, delegitimized, and frequently barred from the ballot. Those opposition parties that manage to register find they are unable to communicate with voters—their campaign activities are shut down and they are denied access to the state-controlled media. The media itself is muzzled. Citizens are intimidated or bribed into voting as the regime sees fit. Civil society groups seeking to monitor the process are shut down and persecuted, and in some cases their leaders are sent to prison. Election administrators, prosecutors and judges answer directly to the regime. Results are predetermined in favor of the incumbent, often with grossly inflated turnout figures and victory tallies above 90 percent. In short, voters are denied the right to express their free will. These are elections in name only. They violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other international conventions.

When governments, intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental groups offer democracy assistance to partners in authoritarian or reforming countries, the objective is to promote citizens’ fundamental right to express their political will freely. That means responding to requests from governments, parliaments, political parties, civic groups, and election administrators to help promote integrity, transparency, participation and accountability in the elections—first and foremost so that basic human rights are defended, but also so that everyone involved can have confidence in the outcome. The purpose of these efforts is not to influence outcomes or change regimes. Rather, it is to help give voice to people who might otherwise be excluded from the process due to a tilted playing field. The assistance is offered openly and in good faith and democratic leaders welcome it because they

understand that credible elections are a pillar of a country's stability and sovereignty.

To give credence to the false equivalence between hybrid warfare and democracy assistance is to do a grave disservice to courageous democracy activists around the world who have made tremendous sacrifices, including risking their lives, because they simply seek free elections, free speech, and a voice in their country's future. The very least they deserve is solidarity from democratic societies around the world.

#### PERSPECTIVES FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

Let me share with you just a few examples to illustrate how authoritarian aggression plays out on the ground in Eurasia.

Evgenia Chirikova is a leading Russian environmental activist. She started a movement in 2010 to defend the Khimki forest near St. Petersburg from construction of a highway. She mobilized thousands of protesters and collected tens of thousands of signatures on petitions, showing that activism ran much deeper than many assumed. As a consequence of her own activism, Evgenia was arrested several times. Some of her fellow activists and journalists were harassed and beaten. In 2011, state authorities threatened to take her children away on the grounds that they were being abused. To keep her family intact, Evgenia was forced to move to Estonia and, undaunted, she continues to support civic activism from there. She has submitted written testimony to this subcommittee in which she outlines the many examples of grassroots organizing that are underway in Russia, despite the risks and obstacles. The peaceful anti-corruption demonstrations that took place just this past weekend appear to reflect her viewpoint.

Russia is a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Under the OSCE's Copenhagen Document, Russia is committed to facilitating international and domestic observation of elections. Yet Russia's nonpartisan citizen election monitors are routinely vilified for simply exercising their right to support electoral integrity. They face fines, arrests and closure of their organizations. When international observers, including those from the OSCE, reported that the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections were fundamentally flawed, these criticisms were deemed tantamount to interference—in another example of false equivalence.

One of the impacts of the repression in Russia has been the isolation of activists from their peers in the international community. Under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Russian citizens have the basic rights to freedom of association and expression, which includes the ability to see, receive and impart information, including across borders. Yet international organizations working in Russia have faced smear campaigns in the media, spurious investigations and legal challenges, threats of blackmail and violence, physical assaults, and laws designed explicitly to restrict contact with Russian citizens. The net effect is to intimidate civic and political activists, who have reason to fear that engaging with an international organization would cause them to be targeted themselves.

Anar Mammadli is the head of a respected nonpartisan citizen election monitoring group in Azerbaijan called the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center. EMDS, as it is called, issued a report that described substantial fraud in Azerbaijan's 2013 presidential election, echoing the findings of other credible observer groups such as the OSCE. As a consequence, Anar served 2.5 years in prison.

Anar will tell you that Azerbaijan's repressive techniques are not necessarily imposed from Russia, but rather borrowed quite willingly. They include "black PR" or smear campaigns in the state-controlled media, travel bans, blackmail, harassment of family members, loss of employment, fabricated tax assessments and legal charges, conscription, and arrest and imprisonment. Earlier this month, Amnesty International reported on a sustained "spear-phishing" campaign in which the passwords, contacts and private communications of Azerbaijani activists were compromised, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of some of those people. Currently there are more than 100 political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, most Azerbaijani citizens have access to news primarily from state-controlled Russian or Azerbaijani television, both of which promote an anti-democratic and anti-Western perspective. Yet Anar Mammadli, like Evgenia Chirikova, continues his work to promote democracy and human rights in the face of these risks.

Belarus is quite dependent, economically and militarily, on its neighbor to the East. The regime of President Lukashenko chafes at these vulnerabilities and periodically turns to the West in an effort to increase its room for maneuver. In times of domestic dissent, however, the government reverts to the authoritarian example set by Russia and reinforced by the dominance of Russian media in the region.

Events this month are a vivid example. Citizens across the country have taken to the streets to protest an ill-conceived tax on unemployment. At first it appeared that the government might try to defuse the situation, but it has since lashed out, reverting to a pattern familiar in Moscow but not seen in Belarus for several years. The government is labeling the protesters “fifth columnists” and “bandits” under the control of the West. This is a clear echo of the overused and fabricated Kremlin claim that all dissent or opposition is organized from the West. More than 300 Belarusians have been arrested or detained in the last 3 weeks—some brutally. Nearly half of these have been sentenced to jail terms.

The picture from Georgia is more promising, but equally complicated. Georgia’s foreign policy is explicitly Western-oriented: it is pro-EU and, for the most part, pro-NATO. NDI’s public opinion surveys show that most Georgians aspire to a democratic and European future. It is thus no coincidence that in 2008, 6 years before the occupation of Crimea, Russia invaded and occupied Georgian territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, effectively obstructing Georgia’s NATO aspirations while granting Russia untold political, economic, and military leverage.

In addition, the influence of external propaganda is strongly felt. Rural Georgians and ethnic minorities who feel neglected by politicians in Tbilisi are particularly likely to be exposed to, and sympathetic toward, Russian messages about alleged threats emanating from the West. One example is the elevation of anti-gay, anti-feminist, and xenophobic campaigns to the forefront of the political agenda. This narrative holds that embracing Europe will force Georgians to violate long-held conservative values. An emphasis on the overriding importance of culture and tradition has the effect of legitimizing violence and exclusion. These campaigns did not originate in Georgia, but once introduced they took root and are now impacting the political landscape. Another prominent narrative is that EU and NATO aspirations are nothing more than naive fantasies. And, as in Belarus, a third narrative is that if Georgia does stray too far toward the West, it will face further military consequences from Moscow.

The presence and tolerance of vocal civic watchdog groups is a sign of a country’s democratic strength. The subcommittee has received testimony from representatives of two such groups in Georgia, Transparency International-Georgia and the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association. Ana Natsvlishvili, Eka Gigauri and Giorgi Oniani paint a vivid picture of the costs that hybrid warfare is imposing on Georgian democracy and sovereignty.

I would like to focus particular attention on Ukraine. The outcome of Ukraine’s struggle to defend its sovereignty and democratic aspirations will have far-reaching consequences for the broader region. Success in Ukraine would be a victory for Ukrainians, first and foremost, but also a major setback for authoritarian aggressors in the neighborhood. It is thus no coincidence that Ukraine has served as a laboratory for every weapon in the hybrid warfare arsenal, particularly since the occupation of Crimea 3 years ago.

Ukraine of course continues to face grave challenges, including economic disruptions, political turmoil, the illegal occupation of Crimea and a war in the East. A favorable resolution of these crises is by no means guaranteed.

Mustafa Nayyem, a journalist, was one of the first activists to call his fellow Ukrainians to Independence Square for the pro-democracy demonstrations now known as the Revolution of Dignity. Svitlana Zalishchuk, a journalist and a civic activist, was also a leader on the Maidan. Remember that more than a hundred people were killed in those demonstrations. Both Mustafa and Svitlana were elected to parliament in 2014 as part of a wave of young democratic activists for whom the Revolution of Dignity was a call to public service. Mustafa and Svitlana have submitted written testimony to this subcommittee describing numerous examples of information warfare that have disrupted Ukraine’s sovereign political processes.

The prevailing misinformation would have us believe that Ukraine is deeply divided and that those Ukrainians who are not supporting fascism are desperate to be rescued by Russia. But recent NDI public opinion research paints an entirely different picture.

First, Ukrainians are overwhelmingly united on the big issues facing their country. The vast majority—86 percent—says it is “important” or “very important” that Ukraine become a fully-functioning democracy. Large majorities support this point regardless of where they live in the country or which party they support. Ukrainians also have a clear and consistent view about how to define democracy: it means equal justice for all, free elections and fundamental freedoms. On the flip side of the coin, 74 percent assess Russia’s influence on their country as negative. Only 4 percent consider it positive.

Ukrainians are also clear and consistent about the path they want to follow. Asked whether they would accept peace in exchange for losing the right to deter-

mine their own future, 80 percent said “no.” Only 5 percent said “yes.” Despite the many pressures they are under, Ukrainians are not willing to give up their territory: 77 percent want the occupied parts of Donbas to be returned to Ukrainian control.

Ukraine’s path to democracy is being driven from the bottom-up, rather than from the top-down. It is propelled by a popular determination, solidified on the Maidan during the Revolution of Dignity, to root out corruption and build a democratic system in which leaders serve the people, and not the other way around. The bottom-up nature of the process means that reforms may proceed relatively slowly, but the end result is likely to be more sustainable.

Further, the polling demonstrates the optimism the Ukrainian people have in the slow but steady progress they are making. By a ratio of two-to-one, Ukrainians expect the next generation to be better off than their own. The ratio hits to five- or six-to-one in places like Kherson in the South and Khmelnytskyi oblast and Lviv in the West. These numbers are significant because they mean that people are willing to make sacrifices now in order to deliver a better future for their children.

Citizens without prior experience in any kind of activism are participating in local decisionmaking in ever-increasing numbers. One quarter has attended community meetings since 2014 and a further 29 percent are willing to do so. These would be respectable figures anywhere, but they are particularly impressive in a country that was known, until relatively recently, for its politically-disengaged population. In other words, the Ukrainian people themselves are committed to the reforms that can make Ukraine more democratic, stable and prosperous. They hold these convictions independently of their current government and despite external pressures to the contrary.

These findings illustrate that hostile external pressure is meeting fierce resistance in Ukraine. At the same time, international assistance that is offered and accepted in good faith is falling on exceedingly fertile soil.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia and the other countries of Eurasia have been training grounds for hybrid warfare. It is thus in the U.S. national security interest to help the countries of Eurasia build resilience so that they can be responsible partners in the community of democracies rather than breeding grounds for global instability.

Which brings us to the question of how the international community can help resist this threat. As we consider ways to address authoritarian aggression, we should bear in mind that the trends we are seeing in Eurasia and Europe are part of a broader pattern. Much of the world is experiencing a rising tide of “illiberalism,” by which I mean elected regimes that hollow out democratic structures, eliminate checks and balances on executive power, and deprive citizens of basic rights and freedoms. The backlash against democracy is driven by authoritarian aggression, to be sure, but also by home-grown extremism and anti-elitism; corruption; migration; economic inequality and insecurity; technological disruptions; and weakened political institutions. All of these elements are powerful in their own right, but they also feed upon and reinforce one another. We see these tendencies in Eurasia and Europe, to be sure, but also to varying degrees in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.

This broader global context reminds us that there is no one-stop solution to the problem of authoritarian aggression.

I would propose that we think in terms of four large baskets of responses:

*First*, we need to reaffirm our transatlantic alliances and our own commitment to democratic principles while supporting the efforts of a new generation of democracy champions. Unless democracy’s defenders are putting forward a compelling and positive narrative of their own, no amount of technical fixes will make a difference.

*Second*, we need to strengthen democratic institutions in the affected countries. This is the first line of defense. When governments are not responsive to citizens and not delivering improvements to their lives, populist and extremist appeals gain traction. This basket has several corollaries.

We need to help citizens engage in politics, by taking civic action, joining parties or running for office. This is particularly true for traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups. The impact of information warfare is to drive people away from politics, which provides a vacuum for extremists to fill. Ordinary people need incentives to get back into politics to fill the political center.

Political parties need to rise above their partisan interests and take the position, as Senator Graham said at an earlier hearing, that an attack on one is an attack on all.

We need to fight corruption, which is simultaneously a cause, a tool, and an effect of hybrid warfare.

*Third*, governments in affected countries need to treat hybrid warfare like the urgent national security threat that it is. Anything less is to do the aggressor's work for him. Political leaders need to develop proactive and whole-of-government counter-strategies. They need to communicate about these strategies in a straightforward way with the public and enlist public-private collaboration.

*And fourth*, Citizens, civil society organizations, political parties, journalists and editors need information, tools and strategies so they can protect themselves and each other from these threats.

For example, NDI will be conducting pilot public opinion research to determine who is most vulnerable to propaganda in target countries and to learn the best ways of building their resilience.

More broadly, there is a need in the vulnerable countries for coalitions to form around the goal of "taking back our elections." These networks would include civil society groups, political parties, governments, academics, journalists, technology experts, and traditional and social media companies.

Depending on local circumstances, specific programs should focus on civic education and media literacy campaigns; training for political parties, civic watchdog groups, journalists and editors; support for investigative journalism; strengthening and expansion of credible Russian-language news sources; assistance for election authorities; development of norms and standards for the integrity of online political discourse; and corporate responsibility campaigns for traditional and social media companies.

Hybrid warfare in Eurasia is an urgent threat—not just to Eurasia, but to Europe and the United States. There are courageous and tireless champions throughout the region who are committed to defending democratic values—Vladimir, Evgenia, Anar, Ana, Giorgi, Eka, Mustafa and Svitlana are just a few examples. And the story of resolve and resilience from Ukraine tells us that it is possible to defend against a military invasion and every other weapon in the hybrid warfare arsenal while still building democracy, slowly and steadily, from below.

But they cannot do it alone. Nor should they. We know from recent experience in our own elections that the tools and techniques of hybrid warfare being tested in Eurasia today will be deployed on our own shores tomorrow.

From our founding days, Americans have held the conviction that to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our country, we must establish government that derives legitimacy and power from the consent of the people. We received the help of others in our founding, and from that point onward have embraced the ethic of assisting those around the world who step forward—sometimes at great risk—to promote, establish and sustain democracy. We have benefited from the peace that global democratic development produces and from the economic opportunities that it creates.

Democracy assistance as a defense against authoritarian aggression in Eurasia remains an essential investment in sovereignty, stability and global security.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF EVGENIA CHIRIKOVA  
Russian Civic Activist

Recently the image of Russia in the world has been very depressing. Russian Federation is perceived globally as aggressive and not very intelligent. And, actually, it's not very intelligent to conduct two wars at the same time under the conditions of growing economic crisis. As a result of almost 20 years under Putin, Russia is rapidly becoming an outcast.

It may seem like there is no civil resistance in Russia. That opposition activists have either been killed, arrested, or forced to emigrate. It may seem like the people are intimidated by propaganda or afraid of being arrested. Putin has taken on the image of an unpredictable bandit in Russia and in the world. Unfortunately, this image is effective. After the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Ukraine, it has become clear that Putin's Russia is able to take any vile or unpredictable step. Within Russia, Putin's entire political machine behaves like an unpredictable ban-



dit, too. For example, dozens of Russians have been imprisoned for simply liking an online post of which the authorities disapproved.

But apart from these disturbing trends, there are also some very encouraging ones. Since 2010 Russian grassroots movements have become more common. Ten years ago, finding examples of grassroots movements in Russia was almost impossible. For example, the movement “Save Khimki Forest” generated great interest in the community and in the media because it was a rare example of a grassroots movement in post-Soviet Russia. It was quite unusual: ordinary citizens decided voluntarily to protect their environmental rights without any direction from government authorities.

Why is this grassroots activity so unusual in Russia while in the West it is a standard phenomenon? The answer can be found in Soviet history, where any activism that was not approved by the state was severely punished.

One hundred years ago, in 1917, political power in Russia was essentially seized by terrorists. Many Communists had a criminal past, including Stalin who was once involved in a bank robbery. Imagine that in a large country like Russia, a terror group came to power and held that power for 70 years. This was the monstrous experiment that citizens endured in my country. The results were terrible—mass repressions, murders of those born into wealthy families and arrests of people whose families were disliked by those in power. But the most important consequence was that the mentality of the people changed. People became passive; they understood that to survive they had to sit quietly, not criticize the government, and not attract attention. Russians and Russian society are the victims of terror under the Soviet Union and now, again, the leader of Russia is a person from another important terror organization—the KGB.

In the Soviet Union, it was impossible to create even a Marxist-Leninist club if it was at the initiative of ordinary citizens. Active people capable of self-organization were dangerous to the Soviet regime because they were able to think independently. Many active citizens were arrested, tortured, and killed in prison. Under Soviet rule, people stopped being independent and active. That is why for so long after the fall of the Soviet Union there were not many grassroots groups in Russia. And that is why I am so glad that now the number of grassroots groups is increasing. If you look at the map of social and environmental activism on the website [activatica.org](http://activatica.org) you will see a lot of points across different parts of Russia. Each of these points represents some kind of social or environmental problem that is being solved by ordinary citizens.

This situation with grass roots activity started to change in 2010. It was a year of horrible environmental catastrophe, when a forest fire near Moscow caused the city to fill with smog. It was impossible to breathe and many people became sick from inhaling the smoke.

Very soon people realized that the authorities would not solve the forest fire problem. As a result, people were forced to organize to put out the forest fires themselves. That same year, thanks to the increased visibility of this forest fire problem, the movement “Save Khimki Forest” was able to organize the first big demonstration in recent years, gathering a crowd of more than 5,000 people. As a result, the president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, publicly admitted that that the highway project through Khimki forest was unpopular and called for a moratorium. It was a major victory for civil society. After that, even though the highway was eventually built, many people understood that they too can stand up and say “no” to unfair government decisions.

This began a new era of grassroots activism in Russia, culminating in mass protests around the Russian elections.

Putin’s regime answered this activism with repressive laws against civil society. The Russian parliament adopted laws to limit protest demonstrations and a law labeling NGOs that receive foreign funding as “foreign agents”. As a result of this law, many NGOs have closed. An organized campaign against NGOs is underway, including open criminal cases against NGOs and TV shows attacking NGO leaders for their Western and liberal values.

Because of these criminal cases, some NGO leaders have fled to Western countries. For example Nadia Kutepova from the environmental NGO “Planet of Hope” sought political asylum and now lives in France:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/3019/title/priznaniya-inostrannogo-agenta>:  
<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/3019/title/priznaniya-inostrannogo-agenta>.

Other members of NGOs have gone to prison, such as Yuriy Dmitriev from Memorial in Karelia.

Dozens of activists have been arrested and imprisoned:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/3043/title/proshjol-mesyac-so-dnya-aresta-glavy-karelskogo-memoriala-yuriya-dmitrieva-cto-izvestno-na-segodnyashniy-den>.

Some activists were even imprisoned for attending an anti-election demonstration in Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2012. Despite the repression, however, the authorities have failed to strangle Russian civil society and the number of grassroots movements continues to grow.

Why are people beginning to organize grassroots movements? After oil prices collapsed, many Russian authorities began to have money trouble. In order to enrich themselves, these officials began to allow construction of commercial buildings in parks and green zones. As a result, ordinary people are losing their public green spaces and are now organizing to defend their territory.

In addition to seizing green spaces, the authorities have also introduced unfair taxes. For example, Moscow highways adopted a new toll system, Platon, which forced long-haul truck drivers to pay for their use. The beneficiary of this system is the son of the oligarch Arkady Rotenberg, who is a close friend of Putin. Truckers responded and organized an all-Russian movement against the Platon tax system. In a way, these unfair public policies are encouraging grassroots activism.

Today, there are several grassroots movements around Moscow, including many environmental movements for the protection of green spaces. As I mentioned before, this is a response to the greedy policies of Moscow authorities to allow the construction of commercial buildings in parks, violating laws that should protect and preserve the green space. People use a variety of methods, sometimes desperate, to protect their rights. For example, defenders of Torfyanka Park and Park Druzhba organized protest camps with volunteers keeping watch for several months in the parks, not allowing construction crews to cut down any trees.

In Park Druzhba, thugs from a private security company were hired to beat up the activists. As a result of this attack, one young park activist was hospitalized. A journalist at [activatica.org](http://activatica.org) conducted an investigation and found that the head of the private security organization was involved in the genocide in Bosnia and recruited volunteers to fight in the war against Ukraine:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/1160/title/izbieniyami-v-parke-druzhby-rukovodil-glavar-boevikov>.

The spread of this news story helped to cause a scandal that stopped future attempts at such attacks.

Defenders of Torfyanka Park have protested for several years against the construction of an Orthodox church in what should be protected park land. They also organized a protest camp in the park and stayed there day and night to protect the trees. Again, hired thugs came to attack the protestors in the camp. They even attacked a 70-year-old woman who was hospitalized with eye damage. The police arrested 12 of the park defenders including their children and elderly disabled parents:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/2560/title/nochnoy-naezd-policii-na-zashchitnikov-torfyanki-s-chey-podachi>.

Despite other offers of places to build the church, the Orthodox Church continues to insist upon building the church in the park and so the confrontation continues.

Grassroots movements in Russia happen not only in the big cities, but also in far-off regions. Right now, in a small village in Karelia, where it is snowy and cold, elderly pensioners are staying day and night in a protest camp. These people, the "Suna Partisans," are protecting their local forest from a company that wants to cut down the trees for a quarry mining project. There are no big population centers near this forest, only a small village inhabited by elderly pensioners. Even elderly villagers are organizing to protect their rights in today's Russia:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/3050/title/zashchitniki-sunskogo-bora-v-karelii-pobedili>.

Another example of grassroots activism in remote parts of Russia is a movement against the construction of the Tominsky mining and metallurgical plant in Chelyabinsk. Chelyabinsk is a large industrial city in the Ural Mountains with a history of devastating environmental problems. Although state propaganda portrays the citizens of Chelyabinsk as loyal to Putin, people in Chelyabinsk are organizing to take action against this environmentally hazardous project. More than 5,000 people gathered in the central square of Chelyabinsk to protest the plant. For a remote Russian town with a long history of environmental and human rights abuses, this level of mobilization is incredible:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/3212/title/razgon-kruglogo-stola-po-probleme-tominskogo-goka>.

Russia's indigenous populations have also taken part in grassroots activism. The views of indigenous people are often ignored as Russian companies exploit oil, gas, and other minerals from native territory. But lately indigenous protests against oil and gas companies are increasing. For example, the Komi-Izhemtsy nation has engaged in a protest campaign against pollution caused by Lukoil. In another region, the indigenous Khanty-Mansi people are protesting to protect a sacred lake from destruction by a planned oil and gas extraction project:

<http://activatica.org/blogs/view/id/3206/title/v-respublike-komi-prodolzhitsya-borba-za-provedenie-jekologicheskogo-referenduma>.

All across Russia's regions, people are gathering into grassroots movements to protect their rights. It is important because participation in grassroots movements changes people's mentality as they start to have a demand for democracy. They begin to understand why they need elections, normal media, courts and police. Activists from grassroots movements themselves are beginning to participate in local elections. There are four people from our movement "Save Khimki Forest" who have been elected members of the local council in Khimki. I think that grassroots movements are the true hope for democratic change in Russia, because this network will be able to support civil society despite political stagnation. Our task is to help grassroots movements in Russia and don't close the door on Russia.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANAR MAMMADLI  
Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center of Azerbaijan

THE PREVENTION OF RUSSIA'S NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON THE DEMOCRATIZATION  
PROCESSES IN THE POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

Following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Russia's influence on the political processes in the post-Soviet countries has been in different forms. Until the mid 1990s, these impacts were in the form of igniting national and ethnic conflicts (Abkhazia, Pridnestriya, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia) and indirectly, through the participation in the military operations. With the acquisition of the ceasefire on military operations, a relatively new phase of Russian influence has started. By establishing a new union (the CIS) after the USSR, Russian political circles attempted to maintain political and geopolitical control over the post-Soviet countries, with the exception of the Baltic states. However, unlike the Council of Europe and the OSCE, this union did not consider the rule of law, protection of human rights and freedoms or the socio-economic development goals. On the contrary, the CIS gradually became the union deprived of democratic institutions, free market economy, social welfare and independent judicial systems.

In the early 2000s, the harsh authoritarian governance was formed with the help of Russia's high oil revenues, as in many post-Soviet countries, and contributed to strengthening the authoritarian regimes in Azerbaijan and Armenia. Since 2003, the establishment of a democratic political environment in Georgia and European-oriented political forces' rise to power has caused tensions in bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia. The political regimes in the other South Caucasus countries saw the Georgian experience as an undesirable example. In the face of criticism by the Western countries, the Council of Europe, OSCE and the European Union of these regimes' violations of human rights and freedoms, Russia's patronage, support and authoritarian governance system became more desirable.

At present, Russia's historical and cultural ties with the post-Soviet countries will keep those countries in the Russian information space. However, the most important problem in these countries, as well as in Russia, is restricting the access to alternative sources of information through the suppression of freedom of expression and constant pressure, and/or the shutdown of the independent television channels and radio stations. For instance, according to the survey conducted in 2015 by BBG and Gallup companies, in response to the question, "Which media source is reliable about Ukraine and Crimea?", the responses pointed out the Russian media as follows: Belarus 67 percent, Azerbaijan 64 percent, Uzbekistan 79 percent, Tajikistan 85 percent. The problem is that the non-democratic governments present in post-Soviet countries did not allow forming free media structures in those countries for many years, making those populations heavily dependent on the information space of Russia.

In recent years, the tensions Russia is experiencing with the Western Institutions, in particular with the Council of Europe and the OSCE in the field of human rights

and democracy is also observed in the countries such as Azerbaijan and Belarus. By making its best efforts to cast shadows over the legitimacy and credibility of these institutions in the post-Soviet countries, the Russian government is setting bad examples for its other neighbors.

In addition, the political pressures by the Russian authorities on the international human rights organizations, including not allowing such organizations to operate in the country, is used by some former Soviet countries' governments as "best practices." As a result, following Russia and Belarus, the activities of the foreign NGOs and foundations were banned in Azerbaijan.

Another negative impact by Russia associated with the democratization processes in many former Soviet countries is reflected in Russia's support for the CIS' ruling political forces through election monitoring by non-professional election observation missions that give legitimacy to the flawed and falsified elections.

For instance, by giving only the biased political views in support for the position of the ruling political forces in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, the CIS Election Observation Missions undermines the position of OSCE/ODIHR, as well as that of the local independent election monitoring groups.

The experience of recent years shows that a number of measures are to be taken by international institutions and democratic states to prevent the negative effects by Russia on the formation of human rights and democratic institutions in the post-Soviet countries:

- Protection of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, support for strengthening independent media institutions, defense for the members of political parties and civil society organizations in the Post-Soviet countries;
- Protection of the international law principles through the resolution of the military conflicts, protection of the territorial integrity of post-Soviet countries and support for the peace-building processes;
- Sanctions against public officials involved in the implementation of political repression, persecution and torture.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF EKA GIGAURI AND GIORGI ONIANI  
Transparency International—Georgia

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are grateful and humbled by this opportunity to testify for the U.S. Senate, on the topic which is immensely critical for the last several hundred years of our country's history.

Russia is the biggest scourge our country has experienced throughout its history. Georgia is a country which has probably suffered most from Russia over the last hundreds of years. Russia has numerously brought war, destruction, continuous devastation and demolition to the country, as well as to our people and to the hopes for the better future of many generations of Georgians.

History of our relationship is history of fighting for independence from Russia,—starting from annexation of Georgia by Russian empire in 1801, we were fully or partially occupied for several times—in 1921, when we were dragged into the Soviet Union and in 2008 when Russian troops invaded and occupied parts of our territory and declared them to be independent states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

But most notably, we have been in fight for independence of our hearts and minds, which has been constantly ongoing and has intensified in the recent years. So called Russian propaganda and disinformation is vividly felt and seen in Georgia, and unfortunately it is also increasingly effective. Less than 10 years have passed after Russia's last invasion, and Russian troops are still standing in the middle of the country, but this had neither prevented pro-Russian rallies in the capital of Georgia, nor an election of openly pro-Russian political party to the Parliament. This is very unfortunate and disappointing, but also proves how effective and sophisticated Russian soft power is in Georgia.

Moreover, Russia remains the main obstacle and hindrance to the process of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. It helps nurture anti-western sentiments in the hearts and minds of Georgians portraying the process as if it aims at destroying the traditions and values of Georgians.

The channels of the propaganda machine are diverse and very sophisticated:

- Russian media and primarily TV channels, (as television remains to be the primary source of information);
- Local, but Pro-Russian media; and

—Local pro-Georgian media—which fosters pro-Georgian values and sentiments as if they are under threat by ‘looming’ Europeanization of the country.

They also distribute messages across the regions of Georgia, and also use diverse channels to transfer these messages (using opinion-makers, the church—as the most trusted institution in Georgia and representatives of cultural sphere).

Basically this is the format and toolkit widely used across our region against the countries and peoples who are trying to break with Russia and integrate to EU and NATO. They are very effective and sophisticated in the whole region and obviously, this needs to be stood against. But only peoples of Georgia, or Moldova or Ukraine cannot handle this. We need firm and continuous support of the international community, but primarily of the United States to be able to succeed in this.

For Georgia, integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions is not a mere foreign policy choice—it is an existential path. Please, be assured, that if Georgia does not integrate with the West we will be swallowed by Russia once—we know this menace and we do not want it to happen again.

Georgia’s success on this path is important and symbolic for Russia and it should be the same for the West. Through opposing Georgia Russia tries to combat and defeat the successful democratic transformational way of development which Georgia projects to the region and beyond. Georgia, with its recent past and Western future encapsulates an alternative way of development in this part of the world. We have tried to prove through our own example that it is possible to be not corrupt, democratic and to develop at the same time—something that seems unrealistic in this part of the world, where Russia tries to dominate the discourse, claiming that it is only possible to develop and move forward together with Russia, and being like Russia. Thus, defeating Georgia’s success case is also very symbolic to Russia, as we pose threat to Russia’s current way of development—that is why they are so aggressive and determined when it comes about Georgia. And please, be assured that Georgia’s successful integration with the West will have tremendous implications for the whole region. We are watched with hope not only by our neighbors in South Caucasus, to the east in Central Asia, where Russia is even more powerful and integration with the West is something remote and almost unrealistic, but also from Russia itself. If Georgia—a country with the same past but different present succeeds on this path, it will pave the way to similar transformations in the whole region—including Russia. That is why, in Georgia’s case, there is more at stake rather than a success of just another post-Soviet country.

But unfortunately, we see that exactly this positive trend of transformation might be under threat in Georgia today, if U.S. support to Georgia is not sustained and strengthened. Not only Russia tries to meddle with the internal developments of Georgia and tries to win the hearts and minds of our people, but also unfortunately, the quality of democracy has deteriorated in Georgia recently, not infrequently, our Government, deliberately or not, plays at hand to Russia and through undermining democratic institutions makes their job easier in Georgia.

On the one hand, over the last year there have been some positive tendencies, especially with regards to human rights, free and fair elections, independence of Judiciary and media pluralism, however, we have recently witnessed some problems with regards to the independence of the Judiciary and Media freedom. Informal governance of former governmental officials and party leaders is still a challenge for Georgian state, which creates obstacles for building independent institutions in Georgia and transparent political process that creates grounds for political corruption. This set of problems aggravate another and a very dangerous one which is lack of clarity and coherence in official position towards Russia: After 2008, diplomatic ties have been broken off and Russia has been legislatively granted a status of an occupant country. Nevertheless, it seems that current Government of Georgia is creeping towards changing the status-quo, without changing anything in the legislation or official policies. In addition to existed international multilateral formats the Government of Georgia has set up additional semi-formal relationship format with Russia through the special representative of the Prime Minister, (Mr. Abashidze) and more importantly avoiding any involvement of the main foreign policy implementation institution—Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main problem with this format is again its non-transparent nature, which leads to the problems of accountability. It seems that without Western and primarily U.S. support the Government of Georgia is unable to effectively withstand the pressure from the Russian side, and it is critically important that U.S. remains Georgia’s strong ally in this regard.

The Government is increasingly coming to recognition of the fact that anti-Western propaganda is a serious challenge for our country and recently strategic communication strategy and action plan have been elaborated. However it is obviously not enough.

Therefore, continuous interest and desire to promote the positive changes in Georgia, from the West and particularly from the side of the United States of America is critically important. Development of democratic institutions and adherence to Western democratic values is the backbone which can keep Georgia on track, that will also retain the positive example of Georgia for the wider region. It is critically important for Georgia not to fail—it is existential for us, but it is also an important hope for the wider region, including to the north of us. And this is truly impossible without very important, vocal and strategic involvement of United States. Without U.S. leadership, Europe, which is often preoccupied with redesigning and re-acknowledging its new role and place in current world will hardly be in a position to cope with these problems alone. At least this has not been the case so far.

That is why the focus of the U.S. influence in Georgia should be the emphasis on more democracy, institution-building and true adherence to Western democratic values from Georgia's ruling elite. And this is most easily done through supporting our Euro-Atlantic path. Helping Georgia integrate more with NATO and EU, the continuous reform conditionality set thereof, would greatly straightjacket any incumbent Georgian Government from possible deviations from democratic institution-building. And this is what United States can do and help current and future generation of Georgians with. Obviously, it is the primary responsibility of Georgian citizens and Georgian Government to maintain our achievements and to move the country forward, however U.S. leadership and assistance in this regard is critically important as it has always been—please, be assured that your moral and financial contribution to Georgia's development has played a crucial role in Georgia's progress and we truly hope that you will continue to stand besides us in this endeavor.

We, the civil society representative of Georgia, call upon you, honorable ladies and gentlemen, to make sure the United States of America maintains its interest and involvement in this part of the world, through promoting values of democracy and human rights and helping our countries get closer with the West. Through this you would help the region stand against devastating and disrupting Russian influence. Georgia's success is key, exemplary and symbolic, which can positively impact the wider region, including inevitable positive changes in Russia itself.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANA NATSVLISHVILI  
Georgian Young Lawyers' Association

ACHIEVEMENTS OF GEORGIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Georgia has one of the most vibrant and diverse civil societies in the Eastern-Partnership region. Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) is one of the oldest and largest non-for-profit, non-governmental organizations focusing on the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law in Georgia. We work on a wide range of issues by providing free of charge legal aid, doing strategic litigation at the national and international level, we engage into legislative and institutional reforms, monitor activities of various state bodies with the aim of promoting transparency and good governance, monitor elections, carrying out awareness raising activities, etc.

As important change-makers and opinion leaders in Georgia, NGOs are often invited to the table and involved in the planning and implementation of important reform processes (legislative as well as institutional reforms), perform watchdog activities, etc. Most of the state bodies and the parliament maintain generally open environment for cooperating with NGOs, though the degree of actually taking into consideration NGOs recommendations varies.

The important role NGOs play in Georgian society is fostered by enabling legal framework for the work of non-for-profit organizations and relatively favorable working conditions (as compared to other countries in the region), as well as pluralistic and rather free media environment. Current media environment allows NGOs to raise voice and reach out to a wider public. However, more recently, concerns about sustainability of pluralistic media have increased, in the light of Rustavi 2 case before the court about the ownership of the shares of the TV company, with reasonable grounds to believe that state authorities were interested in and influencing the outcome of the case, highly controversial reforms in the Public Broadcaster and closure of certain political talk-shows at other private TV stations.

CHALLENGES THAT DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS IN GEORGIA FACE

No serious security or other challenges face human rights defenders in Georgia, although certain issues, which are controversial in Georgian society, (e.g., women's

rights, LGBT issues) sometimes places NGOs or individual activists under unfavorable working environment. Parliamentary elections of 2016 witnessed certain security challenges and unfriendly working conditions for international as well as national election observers.

NGOs are at times subjected to criticism as “western agents”, “vehicles of foreign interests”, and “the ones against national interests.” To defame NGOs, Critics often stress that NGOs are foreign-funded, while neglecting the fact that state institutions are also getting funding for implementing different important projects from the same foreign aid sources. This kind of labeling is very much in line with Russian propaganda. Sometimes state officials also use this labels in their public statements, or portray them as working against state security, which strengthens stigma against NGOs.

NGOs often struggle with highly polarized environment in Georgia. Polarization in Georgia, having political, rather than ideological nature, often contributes to build up two hostile camps, with little middle ground. In such environment, NGOs are often seen not as protectors of universal principles, the rule of law and human rights, no matter who is “the victim” and who—“the abuser”, but as taking a side of one or another political camp. On the other hand, political parties at times also do not shy away from instrumentalizing media and NGOs to foster their interests. One example of that is noticeable number of fake observer organizations which emerge right before elections to “monitor” it. In 2016 GYLA observed use of certain NGOs (about which very little information was known or available in public information sources,) who portrayed themselves as neutral, however in reality clearly overstepped the mandate of election observers, and tried to foster the interests of different political parties.

#### THE ROLE OF RUSSIA: RUSSIA AS AN OCCUPYING POWER

Russia is an occupying power of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, and the whole territory of Abkhazia, including the Upper Abkhazia/Kodori Gorge region following the August War 2008.<sup>1</sup> Continued occupation of the regions of Georgia was recognized by numerous states and international political and legal institutions, including the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Violations During the August War 2008*

Georgian NGOs have lodged a number of applications before the European Court of Human Rights concerning human rights violations committed during the war, in particular:

- Unlawful detention of up to two hundred ethnic Georgians by South Ossetian military and paramilitary forces, at times together with Russian military forces in August 2008;
- Their ill-treatment at the moment of the arrest and/or whilst in detention;
- Forced labour of the able-bodied men;
- Discriminatory treatment due to their Georgian ethnicity/identity and/or citizenship; and
- Violation of their right to respect for family life.

Detainees were civilian inhabitants of the villages within or adjacent to South Ossetia and they were detained in different locations between 9 and 16 August 2008; most of them were taken to the detention facility of the Ministry of Interior of South Ossetia (hereinafter “MVD Isolator”) located in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. Georgian Detainees were held in the MVD Isolator between 7 to 20 days.<sup>3</sup>

During the August War 2008, around 26,000 Georgian citizens in South Ossetia were forced to flee and leave their houses and belongings behind. The massive number of family houses, located in the area currently under Russian occupation, were

<sup>1</sup> See United Nations Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, 3 October 2008, S/2008/631; Statement of Mr. Alasania of Georgia to the United Nations Security Council, 5953rd Meeting, 10 August 2008, S/PV.5953; Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Monitoring Committee Report, ‘The implementation of Resolution 1633 (2008) on the consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia’, 17 December 2008, AS/Mon(2008)33rev.

<sup>2</sup> Decision on the Admissibility of the Application, Georgia v. Russian Federation (II), Application no. 38263/08 of December 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Out of 53 applications on war cases of the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association at the European Court of Human Rights, see e.g. Barbakadze and others v. Russia (application no. 9546/09); Shoshitashvili v. Russia (application no. 8799/09); Chalauri and Others v. Russia (9445/09); Khaduri v. Russia (application no. 8906/09).

deliberately looted and burnt down by Ossetian military and paramilitary forces.<sup>4</sup> For generations the affected population had lived in these houses with their families. Since August War 2008 they have been continuously prevented from returning to their homes. Even where the property of the affected population is not completely destroyed, the owners are continuously denied access to their homes and other belongings by the Russian occupation forces. Consequently, these people have been deprived of their revenue, which they derived from their land.

*Violations Committed After the August War*

Since October 2008, the administrative boundary line (ABL) constructed by de facto authorities of South Ossetia under effective control of Russian armed forces separates the rest of Georgia from the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. While people on both sides continue to cross the ABL for various reasons, such as to access medical care, to visit graveyards, or to see relatives or family members on the other side, most of this movement across the ABL is considered illegal by the *de facto* authorities. Due to these restrictions on freedom of movement, Russian and Ossetian border guards mostly with alleged charge of “illegal border crossing” have arrested residents of Georgian controlled territories, including women, minors and elderly people. Civilian inhabitants of the villages located alongside the ABL have been arrested by the Russian guards while harvesting the capers or cutting wood in close proximity to the ABL.<sup>5</sup>

International independent bodies have expressed their concern over the absence of official crossing points and regulations concerning the crossing of the ABL. The location of the ABL in many places is unclear. In some places the ABL is demarcated but in many places it is not.

Shortly after the 2008 war, in 2008–2009, Russian and South Ossetian military started construction of barbed wire entanglements, barriers, fences and trenches adjacent to the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia, within the territory under Georgian control.

The newly erected barriers and barbed wire fences further resulted in the loss of access to and control over farmland, homes, property and facilities for the residents in many of the villages. Security concerns, Russian and South Ossetian border guards and physical barriers make it impossible for village residents to cultivate the land plots or collect the harvest. At present there are no prospect of demolishing the barbed wire fences, or permitting the village residents to go back to their family houses or cultivate their land plots in the foreseeable future.

Despite the calls from the international community and numerous complaints submitted by the victims with the assistance of Georgian NGOs, the Russian Federation has not provided any effective and independent investigation into the human rights violations committed during and in the aftermath of the war, it has not provided effective remedy, including reparation, for an unjustified interference with their right to respect for their home and family life.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>According to UNOSAT’s experts in Tamarasheni a total of 177 buildings (almost all the buildings in the town) were destroyed or severely damaged. In Kvemo Achabeti, there are 87 destroyed and 28 severely damaged buildings (115 total); in Zemo Achabeti, 56 destroyed and 21 severely damaged buildings (77 total); in Kurta, 123 destroyed and 21 severely damaged buildings (144 total); in Kekhvi, 109 destroyed and 44 severely damaged buildings (153 total); in Kemerti, 58 destroyed and 20 severely damaged buildings (78 total); and in Dzartsemi, 29 destroyed and 10 severely damaged buildings (39 total). Information available at: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/08/27/georgia-satellite-images-show-destruction-ethnic-attacks>.

<sup>5</sup>Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association represents the interest of 18 Georgian citizens detained in the aftermath of 2008 war by the Russian border guards in the following applications: Biganishvili and others v. Russia, app. no. 59827/10; Kobaladze and Others v. Russia, app. no. 50135/09; Lomsadze and others v. Russia, app.no. 77190/11; Akhvediani and Takadzeebi v. Russia, Karkishvili and others v. Russia.

<sup>6</sup>Out of 53 applications on war cases of the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association at the European Court of Human Rights, see e.g. Turashvili and Others v. Russia (application no. 52486/09); Arbolishvili v. Russia (application no. 8611/09); Kochishvili and Others v. Russia (application no. 8976/09); Nebieridze and Others v. Russia (application no. 9239/09); Askilashvili and Others v. Russia (application no. 8996/09); Zubashvili and Others v. Russia (application no. 8912/09); Razmadze and Others v. Russia (application no. 9221/09); Beruashvili and Others v. Russia (application no. 10341/09); Tsitsiloshvili v. Russia (application no. 10046/09); Kristesiashvili and Others v. Russia (application no. 10312/09); Gogidze and Others v. Russia (application no. 16993/09).

Russia has committed breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law norms during the August War in 2008 and in the aftermath. In its 97th session the Human Rights Committee (the Committee) has issued a recommendation to the Russian Federation (i) to conduct independent investigation into human rights violations committed by Russian forces and other armed groups under their control in South Ossetia, Georgia, and (ii) to provide effective remedy to victims of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.



Similar to Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia, following human rights violation took and continue to take place in Abkhazia, Georgia:

- Undue restrictions on the local population wishing to cross the ABL administered by Abkhaz border guards and Russian armed forces (freedom of movement).<sup>7</sup>
- Continued violation of the right to property (property claims) and access to effective remedy (discrimination on ethnic grounds of Georgians, creation of Property Claims Commission only for ethnically Abkhaz and Russian persons);<sup>8</sup>
- Russian border guards along the administrative boundary line with Abkhazia typically enforce the boundary-crossing rules imposed by de facto authorities by fining and releasing detained individuals (arbitrary deprivation of liberty and violation of the procedural guarantees);<sup>9</sup>
- Security situation in Gali district (populated by ethnic Georgians) including inter alia security arrests, kidnapping, methods of conscription and treatment of ethnic Georgian conscripts, and etc.<sup>10</sup>
- Ill treatment and abuse during detention as well as poor detention conditions.<sup>11</sup>

As an occupying power maintaining effective control over the two break-away regions of Georgia, Russia bears responsibility for the human rights violations committed, which were described above. It has the obligation to investigate those abuses and provide victims with the right adequate reparations.

Very little official information is available on the human rights and humanitarian situation in South Ossetia due to limited access, however allegations of abuse persist. With the exception of one international human rights assessment, access to Abkhazia also remains limited.<sup>12</sup>

Taking into consideration the above facts, GYLA strongly supports ongoing ICC investigation into the August 2008 War.

*The Role for United States to play*

- Continue support for the non-partisan, non-for-profit civil society organizations in Georgia, particularly in the field of human rights, democracy and rule of law;
- Pay particular attention to Russian propaganda and use of soft power in Georgia and other Eastern Partnership countries;
- Continue support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- Use instruments and fora available to USA to raise the issue of Russia's international legal responsibility for continues occupation and human rights violations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF MUSTAFA NAYYEM AND SVITLANA ZALISHCHUK  
Members of the Parliament of Ukraine

Honorable members of the United States Senate,

On behalf of Svitlana Zalishchuk and Mustafa Nayyem, members of the Parliament of Ukraine, we would like to provide you with evidence of Russia actively financing artificial 'civil society' initiatives and spreading fake stories not only in Ukraine but also in other democratic countries in order to create a negative image of Ukraine and interfere with the political process. We present a few examples which show how Russia is using bogus 'civic' organisations, news agencies and mainstream Russian media, trolls and misinformation as part of its hybrid war against Ukraine:

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Furthermore, the Committee stressed that Russia bears responsibility for violations that take place in the territory that fall under its de facto control (see CCPR/C/RUS/CO/6 pp. 5–6).

<sup>7</sup>PACE, Resolution 1683, op. cit., para. 7. International Crisis Group, *Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence*, Europe Report No. 202 (26 February 2010), p. 4. PACE, Doc. No. 12039, para. 17, op. cit. GWS, Vol. III.

<sup>8</sup>Georgia's Human Rights Report for 2011 and 2012 (available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160457.pdf> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204499.pdf>).

<sup>9</sup>Georgia's Human Rights Report for 2013 (available <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220492.pdf>).

<sup>10</sup>Georgia and Russia: the humanitarian situation in the conflict and war-affected areas, PACE Doc. 13083, 20 December 2012, (available at <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=19238&lang=en>).

<sup>11</sup>Report on the visit to the region of Abkhazia, Georgia, carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 27 April to 4 May 2009 (available at <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/geo/2009-38-inf-eng.htm>).

<sup>12</sup>U.S. State Department Report on Georgia (2016) available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265634.pdf>.

1. Alexander Usovsky, a Belarusian living in Poland, received more than 100,000 U.S. dollars from Russia in order to finance anti-Ukrainian nationalist groups in Poland and to set Poles against Ukrainians. Usovsky's correspondence with the Russian MP and director of the Institute of CIS countries, Konstantin Zatulin, who provided this funding, was revealed by the Ukrainian groups CyberHunta and Cyber Alliance. Usovsky coordinated his anti-Ukrainian actions with Mateusz Piskorsky, who founded the openly pro-Russian party "Change" in 2015 and a year later was detained by the Polish authorities, accused of espionage in favor of Russia against Poland.

"For Money From Russia Against Poland in Ukraine": <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,21472245,za-kase-kremla-w-polsce-przeciw-ukrainie.html?disableRedirects=true>.

"Pro-Russian Activism of Mateusz Piskorski, Detained in Poland": <http://www.interpretermag.com/pro-russian-activism-of-mateusz-piskorski-detained-in-poland/>.

2. Harry van Bommel, a left-wing member of the Dutch Parliament, used a "Ukrainian team" that actually included Russians in an effort to influence the Dutch referendum in 2016 on ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Presenting themselves as Ukrainians, the members of the "Ukrainian team" attended public meetings, appeared on television and used social media to denounce Ukraine's pro-Western government as a bloodthirsty kleptocracy, unworthy of Dutch support, and also to promote implausible alternative theories for the downing of the Boeing jet carrying Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.

"Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How a Group of Russians Tilted a Dutch Vote": <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/world/europe/russia-ukraine-fake-news-dutch-vote.html>.

3. Russian state TV Channel One showed a scene where a small boy was crucified "just like Jesus" by the Ukrainian army in eastern Ukraine in Sloviansk while his mother was tied to a tank, and dragged three times around the city's central square. Some days later Russian opposition leaders Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov in Sloviansk said that there was no evidence that such a public execution had taken place and called for the management of Channel One, Russia's most popular channel, to be put on trial for broadcasting it.

"There's No Evidence the Ukrainian Army Crucified a Child in Slovyansk": <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/15/there-s-no-evidence-the-ukrainian-army-crucified-a-child-in-slovyansk.html>.

4. Russian newspaper Moskovskiy Komsomolets falsely accused Ukraine of presenting a staged video game as evidence at a hearing before the UN International Court of Justice in The Hague. "As proof, Ukraine demonstrated a video game seemingly showing Russia transporting heavy artillery for the militia" in eastern Ukraine, the newspaper writes. This spurious claim is not supported by any evidence, link or explanation. Other media who disseminated similar stories claiming that Ukraine presented a video game as evidence include Rambler News, Nesam.net.ua, Zagolovki, Live News and others. The full session of the ICJ hearing is available on the court's website where the documentary visualization is also available. (1:48:00–1:54:00).

"Ukraine Has Brought the Video Game on the Court Against Russia in Hague": <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/03/06/ukraina-predyavila-igrovoe-video-na-sude-protiv-rossii-v-gaage.html>.

The ICJ hearing: [http://www.icj-cij.org/presscom/view\\_vod.php?event=20170306\\_ur&filename=5349310122001](http://www.icj-cij.org/presscom/view_vod.php?event=20170306_ur&filename=5349310122001).

5. The pro-Russian Novorossia news agency published a story accusing Ukrainian armed forces of robbing and looting local Ukrainians in the conflict zone and illustrated this fake story with a photograph of a soldier carrying two geese. This photograph actually shows a Russian soldier and was taken in Chechnya in 1995. This photograph was posted on the Russian social media site LiveJournal by a user named *Frallik* in 2013. Frallik writes that the photo was taken in 1995 in Meskenduk, during the second Chechen war.

"Fake: Russian Soldier Looting in Chechnya Presented as Ukrainian": <http://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-russian-soldier-looting-in-chechnya-presented-as-ukrainian/>.

6. Fake reports alleged that the Ukrainian air force had targeted Russian President Vladimir Putin's plane, which flew over the same region as MH17 one hour earlier. Just three hours before MH17 was downed, The Associated Press reported the passage of a Buk M-1 missile system—a machine the size of a tank bearing four ground-to-air missiles—through the rebel-held town of Snizhne near the crash site. A highly placed rebel officer told the AP in an interview after the disaster that the plane was shot down by a mixed team of rebels and Russian military personnel who believed they were targeting a Ukrainian military plane.

“Russian Pictures of MH17 Being Shot by Ukrainian Jet ‘Fake’”: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11233420/Russian-pictures-of-MH17-being-shot-by-Ukrainian-jet-fake.html>.

“Russia’s Fictions on Malaysia Flight 17”: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/opinion/russias-fictions-on-malaysia-flight-17.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FMalaysia%20Airlines%20Flight%2017>.

7. At the end of February 2017 several Russian publications claimed that European countries were accusing Ukraine of releasing a radioactive isotope into the continent's atmosphere. An increase in iodine-131 was first noticed in Norway in mid-January, eventually traces were also picked up in Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, France and Spain. No European publication has reported that the leak originated in Ukraine. Only Russian media, such as RIA Novosti Ukraina, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Anna News, Forum.msk.ru, Operativnaya Linia, Otkrytaya elektronnyaya gazeta claimed that the source of the leak was Ukraine, but did not provide any evidence to support the claim. Citing the Independent and the Barents Observer as its sources, the RIA story points the finger of blame directly at Ukraine, however, Ukraine does not figure in their stories at all. According to the Independent, the unusual activity could be coming from a secret Russian nuclear missile launch, or from a hidden pharmaceutical business, but nobody is entirely sure.

“In Europe—A Mysterious Flash of Radiation”: <http://rian.com.ua/analytics/20170224/1021704749.html>.

“The Increase of Radioactivity Europe Blames Ukraine”: <http://kp.ua/incidents/567761-v-povyshenny-radyoaktyvnoho-fona-evropa-obvyniaet-ukraynu>.

“Mysterious Radiation Spreading Across Europe After Authorities Keep it Secret”: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/radiation-europe-russian-missile-strike-radioactive-material-france-norway-iodine-131-irsn-a7591886.html>.

“Radioactive Iodine Over Europe First Measured in Finnmark”: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/ecology/2017/02/radioactive-iodine-over-europe-first-measured-finnmark>.

8. Russian media site Polit Online recently published a story claiming that the United Nations (responding to a request by former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich from 2014 calling for Russian troops to enter Ukraine) gave Russia permission to invade Ukraine. The source for this story is a Facebook post by Ukraine's Attorney General, Yuriy Lutsenko, in which he states that the UN's office in Ukraine has received official copies of Viktor Yanukovich's 2014 letter asking for Russian troops to enter Ukraine and related official documents from the Russian Federation presented to the UN in support of Yanukovich's request. Lutsenko's post includes copies of the documents in question. According to UN protocol, each UN member has the right to distribute documents to the General Assembly and the UN Security Council. The UN Secretariat distributes such documents after they've been assigned registration numbers for archiving and records. The dissemination of such documents is the normal order of business within the UN, in no way is it a United Nations stamp of approval or permission for one country to seize or capture another, as Polit Online claims.

Yuriy Lutsenko's post: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=625853430947169&set=a.139021569630360.1073741834.100005675529100&type=3&theater>.

9. Russian state news agency TASS declared that the U.S. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, had named the terms under which Crimea would be recognized as part of Russia and Lenta.ru quickly followed suit claiming that he “clarified” those conditions. Both agencies ignored the fact that Mr. Tillerson clearly stated that Russia's annexation of Crimea was illegal and violated Ukraine's sovereignty. Tillerson did not outline any conditions for such recognition. On the contrary, he said that Russia

had no right to take Crimea and the weak response for this action from the U.S. emboldened Moscow. Responding to Senator Rob Portman's question that United States would never recognize the annexation of Crimea similar to the way it had never recognized the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, Mr. Tillerson responded: "The only way that could ever happen is if there were some broader agreement that would be satisfactory to the Ukrainian people, so absent that, we would never recognize the annexation". RIA Novosti, Russian Defense Ministry television channel Zvezda, the newspaper Vzglyad, TASS, Vedomosti, Lenta.ru, Interfax and many other Russian media organizations also disseminated this fake story.

"Tillerson: U.S. Will Recognize the Crimea Reunification With Russia if Ukraine Will Remove Its Objections": <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3933750>.

"Candidate for U.S. Secretaries of State to Specify the Conditions of Recognition of the Crimea Russia": <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/01/11/tillerson-/>.

10. Director of the organization "Fair Help", Elizaveta Glinka, better known as Dr. Lisa, brought children from Donbas to Russia without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities. In numerous interviews, she has asserted that there are no Russian troops in Ukraine, claiming that people are dying from shelling by the Ukrainian army. Her work in recent years had a propagandistic purpose as she directly helped to give the Putin regime a "human face", and for that she was presented with an award by the Russian president.

"Dr. Lisa. A Cover for the Regime or an Angel, Who Served Evil": [http://ru.espresso.tv/article/2016/12/26/doktor\\_lyza\\_shyrma\\_dlya\\_rezhyma\\_ily\\_angel\\_kotoryy\\_sluzhyl\\_zlu](http://ru.espresso.tv/article/2016/12/26/doktor_lyza_shyrma_dlya_rezhyma_ily_angel_kotoryy_sluzhyl_zlu).

11. A fake video showing the Dutch flag being burned and terror threats made against the Netherlands was manipulatively presented as an official statement of the Ukrainian battalion "Azov". As the investigation of the analytical group Bellingcat shows, this video was initially spread and likely created by the same network of accounts and news sites that are operated by Russia's infamous "St. Petersburg Troll Factories" which form part of their Internet Research Agency and its sister organization, the Federal News Agency.

"Behind the Dutch Terror Threat Video: The St. Petersburg "Troll Factory" Connection": <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/04/03/azov-video/>.

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Surotchak.

**JAN ERIK SUROTCHAK, REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR EUROPE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE**

Mr. SUROTCHAK. Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, subcommittee Members, thank you for holding this timely and important series of hearings.

Following such a brave and committed patriot as Vladimir Karamurza on this panel, I am not sure what I could add that compares to what he has given and done. Vladimir, I remember very clearly the evening in September of 2015 when Senator McCain presented you with IRI's Freedom Award on behalf of the great Boris Nemtsov and thinking at the time how fortunate the Russian people are to have you playing an important and courageous—the important and courageous role you do in promoting democracy and human rights in Russia.

Still, with all humility, I will try to offer some insights into what we see as the Russian Federation's systematic campaign to undermine democratic institutions across Europe, both Central and Western.

It seems to me it is always good to start with a clear strategic goal. And in Europe, the goal of the United States was crystallized by George H.W. Bush in May of 1989 to build and maintain a "Europe whole and free." At that time, the field for democracy advocates, both European and American, was wide open. The people of the newly freed former Warsaw Pact countries were hungry for as-

sistance. Those of us in the field at the time felt the full support of the United States Government, and Russian interference was declining dramatically following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Two decades later, the strategic situation has changed radically. Today it is Moscow's goal that is quite clear, to destroy the institutions of democracy and security that the United States and Europe constructed together after the Second World War. Most importantly, the European Union and NATO. This does not just affect Europe. It also damages American security and prosperity by undermining our largest trading partner and our most important international alliance.

Let me be perfectly clear. Vladimir Putin's Russia has made this a zero-sum game. Where democracies prosper in its neighborhood, it loses.

As an organization that works with political parties around the globe, including in Europe and Eurasia, IRI has seen firsthand the destructive influence of this campaign to weaken democratic institutions. With support from the National Endowment for Democracy, we are now working to counter Russian meddling in European affairs by strengthening transatlantic alliances to counter Russian disinformation and interference. This program, called the Beacon Project, because it is designed to shine a light on Russian meddling, has identified five pillars of engagement by the Kremlin to achieve its strategic goals.

Mr. Chairman, I will briefly touch on each of these and go into more depth on a couple.

The first of these five pillars is direct financial or political support of parties that take the Russian Federation position in the national and/or European Union level debate. The most extensively documented example of this practice, of course, is the combined 11 million euros that has been funneled to Marine Le Pen's *Fronte Nationale* in France, but there are many more examples.

In Germany, the increasingly deep ties between the right wing anti-establishment *Alternative fur Deutschland* and Putin's United Russia party have raised red flags—yes, pun fully intended. With the *AfD* youth organization last year agreeing to a formal partnership with the youth wing of United Russia. In December of 2016, the *Freedom Party of Austria* also announced a 5-year plan agreement with Putin's party.

In Hungary, the extreme right wing *Jobbik* party is under investigation for allegedly receiving funds from the Russian Government. *Jobbik's* lavish campaign spending in 2009, 2010, and 2014 prompted suspicions, as have the activities of Members of the European Parliament *Béla Kovács*, widely known as *KG Béla*, who has long been a person of interest to Hungarian intelligence. In 2014, the Hungarian Government asked the European Parliament to strip *Béla* of his parliamentary immunity in order to continue its investigation.

And this is not only a problem of the far right. Italy's regionalist *Northern League* and the far-right *New Force* and Greece's left-wing *Syriza* and right-win *Golden Dawn* have also come under scrutiny as a result of their support for Moscow.

The second pillar of Moscow's effort to undermine Europe is in its execution of sophisticated disinformation campaigns against

governments, parties, and individuals who do not tow the Kremlin's line. And here I would like to spend just a bit more time.

As you know, there are three major elections in Europe this year: in the Netherlands, earlier this month; in France, later this spring; and most importantly, in Germany in September. Knowing that pretty much any other possible coalition that might succeed her will not maintain the European consensus on the sanctions regime imposed on Moscow for its aggression in the Ukraine, we see Moscow directing the full force of its disinformation fury on Chancellor Merkel and her Christian Democratic Union.

Taking the long view, this is nothing new. After the Russian Revolution, Adolph Joffe, the first Bolshevik ambassador to Germany, was caught carrying anti-German propaganda in his diplomatic bags. But, of course, today the viral nature of the Internet has made the transmission of propaganda far more immediate and far more dangerous.

Evidence collected by IRI's Beacon Project suggests that the campaign against the Merkel government rests on three core narratives, some of which have also been adapted in other European countries. First, that Merkel's immigration and refugee policies have left the country at the mercy of Muslim criminals. The infamous "Lisa Case" of early 2016 and the recent follow up "Lisa 2.0 Case," in which migrants were falsely accused of raping a young ethnically Russian girl in Germany, are the clearest example of this narrative.

Second, that Merkel's Germany alternatively is the source of violence. This was the main thread in last month's fake news regarding an alleged rape by German soldiers deployed by NATO in Lithuania. And, third, that Merkel's policies risk weakening the economy by driving hardworking Germans out of the country.

These narratives illustrate the way in which the Kremlin exploits legitimate policy debates surrounding German's open door migrant policy and exacerbates tension through fake news. With the German Bundestag already having been hacked, the country's leaders are very aware of the threat posed to their democratic process. We can surely expect much more Russian engagement in that country in the run-up to the elections on September 24.

The third pillar of Russia's effort is to seize upon areas of domestic tension, to sow divisions that play to its advantage. Perhaps the clearest example of this tactic could be seen in the campaign leading up to the April 6, 2016 referendum in The Netherlands organized by an anti-EU NGO, asking whether or not the public would support the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine.

Here, anti-Ukrainian Russian narratives were picked up almost verbatim by the far-right and the far-left in their respective "No" campaigns. Flyers contending that Ukraine suffers from armed fascist militias roaming the streets were taken directly from Russian propaganda outlets. On the left, the Socialist Party made the Association Agreement responsible for Russian led violence in the Ukraine. As such, Dutch voters were asked to believe that having Ukraine in the EU would antagonize Russia and risk war on Europe's doorstep. Faced with this sophisticated campaign of scare-mongering, 61 percent of the Dutch electorate voted "No." The only real winner that day, of course, was Moscow.

The fourth pillar of the Russian effort is the use of fake democracy support organizations. Just as Russia has become one of the world's leading sources of fake news, the Russian Federation has established so-called democracy support organizations that actually exist to discredit elections that do not deliver Moscow friendly governments and legitimize elections that do deliver the desired results.

As recently as last month, the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region held a so-called constitutional referendum that was observed by fake election monitors from far-right parties allied with Putin's United Russia party, including representatives of the German AfD and the Austrian FPÖ.

The fifth pillar of the Russian effort is funding for think tanks and other NGOs inside the European Union. A number of large, Russian Government organized non-governmental organizations, or GONGOs, support think tanks across Europe in an effort to influence foreign policy and break the sanctions regime imposed on Moscow by the EU.

Mr. Chairman, IRI's Beacon Project collects and analyzes data that enable us to understand the campaign I just outlined for you and your fellow subcommittee members. We do this for one purpose: to share with policymakers in Europe at the national and EU level, and help develop a stronger transatlantic response to Russian influence. In Europe, this means working with parties and NGOs to restrict foreign funding for political parties. It also means working closely with members of the European Parliament to press for full funding of the European External Action Service's StratCom East counter-disinformation effort.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is uniquely positioned to take the lead on what may be one of the defining geopolitical challenges of our time. It is in our national security and economic interest to do so. Twenty-eight years after George H.W. Bush's speech in Mainz in 1989, we are undoubtedly further along in building a Europe whole and free and at peace. But threats we thought that had been vanquished have returned in full force and partnership with our European allies is as important as ever. We at IRI look forward to continuing this important work and I thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective with you today.

[The statement follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAN ERIK SUROTCHAK

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, subcommittee members, thank you for holding this timely and important series of hearings. As you may know, the International Republican Institute (IRI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing representative government and democratic values around the world. We trace our roots back to President Reagan's unshakeable belief that, "Freedom is not the sole prerogative of a lucky few, but the inalienable and universal right of all human beings." As such, we are deeply concerned about the systematic campaign by the Russian Federation to undermine democratic institutions across Europe.

#### MOSCOW'S STRATEGIC INTEREST IN UNDERMINING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Chairman, IRI has been working to support the full implementation of President George H.W. Bush's vision of a "Europe whole and free" since the early 1990s. At the time, the field for democracy advocates—both European and American—was wide open. The people of the former Eastern bloc were hungry for assistance, we

had the full support of the United States Government, and Russian interference declined dramatically following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Two decades later, the strategic situation has changed radically, and in some ways has reversed. As the United States has scaled back its global engagement, Vladimir Putin has been emboldened, cracking down on dissent at home and pursuing policies of aggression and provocation abroad. One of the central pillars of Putin's approach to foreign policy has been to destroy the post-Cold-War transatlantic consensus, and the inroads he has made are deeply disturbing.

The Kremlin has deployed a multi-faceted campaign to achieve its objectives. Moscow effectively uses its control of energy supplies to effectively blackmail its neighbors; regularly practices military gamesmanship in areas such as the Baltic Sea; and has been the power behind covert operations to bring down democratic governments, which we most recently saw in Montenegro. Russian support for divisive parties and political movements in Europe has been increasing for at least the last decade, and now poses a major challenge to the political well-being of the Continent.

As an organization that works with political parties around the globe—including Europe and Eurasia, IRI has seen firsthand the destructive influence of this campaign to weaken democratic institutions. As a result, with support from the National Endowment for Democracy, we are now working to countering Russian meddling in European affairs by strengthening transatlantic alliances and identifying sources of Russian disinformation and interference. This program, called the Beacon Project, has identified five general categories of engagement employed by the Kremlin to achieve its strategic goals.

#### DIRECT FINANCIAL OR POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR SELECTED PARTIES

The first of these five areas is direct financial and/or political support of political parties that support Russian Federation positions on the national and/or at the European Union level. The most extensively-documented example of this practice is the 9 million Euros given to Marine Le Pen's *Fronte Nationale* in France in 2014—the largest documentable Russian financial investment in a foreign far-right party to date. In the same year, party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen's political fund Cotelec received another 2 million Euro loan from a Russian-backed fund based in Cyprus. There are also increasing concerns that Russia has made at least indirect inroads with mainstream French parties including the center-right *Les Republicains*, as recent revelations about their presidential candidate's private business activities suggest close personal business links between the candidate and Russian officials.

In Germany, while there has been no financial trail, the increasingly deep ties between the right-wing, anti-establishment *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party and Putin's United Russia party in Moscow have raised red flags. In 2016, the AfD youth organization (*Junge Alternative* or JA) entered into a formal relationship with the youth wing of United Russia. These relationships give the AfD international credibility and connected it with valuable international campaign and organizational expertise. Similarly, in December 2016 the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) announced a "Five Year Plan" agreement with Putin's United Russia Party.

In Hungary, the extreme right-wing *Jobbik* party is reportedly under investigation for allegedly receiving funding from the Russian Government. Jobbik's lavish campaign spending in 2009, 2010 and 2014 prompted suspicions, as did the activities of MEP Bela Kovacs, widely known as KGBela, who has a long record of close ties to Moscow. The Hungarian government has asked the European Parliament to strip Bela of parliamentary immunity in order to continue its investigation.

This is not merely a problem with the far-right. Italy's regionalist Northern League and the far-right New Force from Italy and Greece's left-wing Syriza and right-wing Golden Dawn have also come under scrutiny as a result of their support for Moscow. And while evidence of an actual transfer of funds has not yet emerged, leaders of all three parties regularly participate in conferences, seminars and other events organized by Russian Government-backed think-tanks in Moscow.

#### ORGANIZED DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

The second pillar of Moscow's effort to undermine Europe is its execution of sophisticated disinformation campaigns against governments, parties and individuals who do not toe the Kremlin's line. In some countries, the objective is to simply muddy the public debate, but in other countries, Russian reach higher. The launch of a French language version of its Russia Today in advance of the French elections is no coincidence, as Russian-funded outlets have coalesced around pro-Moscow candidates and have vilified pro-transatlantic candidate Emmanuel Macron.

In Germany, the ultimate goal is to remove Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union party from power in this year's elections. In addition to the many examples



of disinformation narratives designed to undermine Merkel's government, Germany's leading intelligence officials have warned that the country will almost certainly face cyberattacks and other attempts at election meddling.

Taking the long view, this is nothing new. After the Russian Revolution, the first Bolshevik ambassador to Germany was caught carrying anti-German propaganda. Of course today, the Internet has made the transmission of propaganda far more sophisticated and dangerous.

Evidence collected by the Beacon Project suggests that the campaign against the Merkel government has rested on three core narratives, some of which have also been adapted to other European countries.

- First, that Merkel's immigration and refugee policies have left the country at the mercy of Muslim criminals. The infamous "Lisa Case" of early 2016 and the "Lisa 2.0 Case," in which migrants were falsely accused of raping women in Germany, are the clearest examples of this narrative.
- Second, that Merkel's government is incapable of protecting women and children from violence, or *alternatively* that Germany is the source of violence. This was the main thread in last month's fake news regarding an alleged rape by German soldiers deployed by NATO in Lithuania.
- And third, that Merkel's policies have weakened the economy by driving ethnic Germans out of the country.

These narratives illustrate the way in which the Kremlin exploits legitimate policy debates surrounding Germany's open-door migrant policy and exacerbates tensions through fake news. With the German Bundestag already having been hacked, the country's leaders are very aware of the threat posed to their democratic process. We can surely expect much more Russian engagement in that country in the run-up to elections on September 24.

#### TAKING ADVANTAGE OF UNFORESEEN DOMESTIC DEBATES

It has often been said that all politics is local. Moscow has clearly absorbed this lesson, as they've seized upon areas of domestic tension to sow divisions that play to their advantage. The tactics deployed in Germany referenced above are just one of many examples. But perhaps the clearest example of this tactic could be seen in the campaign leading up to the April 6, 2016, referendum in The Netherlands organized by an anti-EU NGO, asking whether or not the public would support the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine.

After Russian puppet Viktor Yanukovich was ousted in the Maidan Revolution of 2014 and Russia responded by annexing Crimea and invading Donetsk and Luhansk, Moscow justified its illegal actions by arguing that Ukraine had been taken over by fascist bandits. This same narrative found its way into the syllabus of the "No" campaign in the Dutch referendum in the form of flyers contending that Ukraine suffers, among other things, from "armed fascist militias" roaming the streets. This material was taken directly from Russian propaganda outlets.

Again, this wasn't just a right-wing problem. The Socialist Party, as part of its "3 X No" campaign against the referendum, condemned the Association Agreement as "partially responsible" for "a bloody civil war with nearly 10,000 deaths and more than a million people in flight" from or within Ukraine. Of course, this ignores the fact that it was Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Agreement that brought about his downfall and that Russia invaded with the aim of undermining the legitimate Ukrainian Government. Dutch voters were asked to believe that voting to remain in the EU would antagonize Russia and risk war on Europe's doorstep. Faced with this sophisticated campaign of scaremongering, 61 percent of the Dutch electorate voted "No."

#### USE OF FAKE "DEMOCRACY SUPPORT" ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE

Just as Russia has become one of the world's leading sources of "fake news," the Russian Federation has established so-called "democracy support" organizations that actually exist to discredit elections that do not deliver Moscow-friendly governments, and legitimize elections that deliver the desired results.

As recently as last month, the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region held a so-called "constitutional referendum" that was "observed" by fake election monitors from far-right parties allied with Putin's United Russia party, including representatives of the German AfD and Austrian FPÖ. For the Russian Federation, the goal is to maintain conflict in the region between Armenia and Azerbaijan and angle to support both in order to enhance their regional leverage. Russia has played a similar game in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and the Baltic States—not mention countries outside of Europe where they are seeking to increase their influence.

A few of the fake “democracy support” organizations worth noting include the Eurasian Observatory for Democracy and Elections (EODE), which claims to have a presence in Moscow, Paris, Brussels, Sochi, and Chisinau. The EODE notoriously fielded observation missions for the March 2014 Crimean Referendum and the November 2014 “parliamentary elections” in Donetsk and Luhansk. The organization describes itself as “committed to a multipolar world” and to “the unity of Eurasia, designed as geopolitical entity,” a vision it says is “shared by many governmental and political spheres, including the current Russian leadership and V.V. Putin.”

The European Centre for Geopolitical Analysis (ECGA) is a Kremlin surrogate based in Poland, run by Polish far-right political figure Mateusz Piskorski. In May 2016, Piskorski was detained by Polish authorities on suspicion of espionage for Russia and possibly China. The ECGA’s promotional materials boast that “Our monitoring services have been already twice highly estimated by the Central Electoral Commission of Russian Federation which granted us, as the only NGO, exclusive access and accreditation to observe parliamentary and presidential elections.”

One of the most frequent participants in EODE and ECGA missions is a former Austrian MP and MEP Ewald Stadler. Stadler has proposed the creation of an Agency for Security and Cooperation in Europe (ASCE), in a clear attempt to undermine the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe or OSCE.

#### SUPPORT FOR EUROPEAN THINK TANKS

Russian funding for think tanks and other NGOs inside the European Union is another component of the Kremlin’s soft-power strategy. A number of large, Russian “government-organized non-governmental organizations” or GONGOS support think tanks across Europe in an attempt to influence foreign policy. This effort is most clearly motivated by a desire to break the sanctions regime imposed by the EU as a result of its illegal annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine.

#### CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, IRI’s Beacon Project collects and analyzes the data that enables us to understand the campaign I just outlined for you and your fellow subcommittee members. We do this for one purpose: to share with policy makers in Europe at the national and European Union level, and help develop a stronger transatlantic response to Russian influence. In Europe, this means working with parties and NGOs to restrict foreign funding for political parties. It also means working closely with members of the European Parliament to press for full funding of the European External Action Service’s East StratCom counter-disinformation effort. The Beacon Project is in the process of fielding a multinational poll that will provide valuable public opinion research to aid these efforts.

Although the picture I’ve painted is worrying, there are encouraging signs on a number of fronts. Last month, the United Kingdom announced a 700 million pound “Empowerment Fund” to support allied governments in their battle against Russian soft-power aggression. In January, the Czech government launched the Center Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats to manage their push-back against Russian disinformation. And governments across Europe are scrambling to fortify the Russian intelligence capacities that had withered in the wake of the Cold War. These initiatives make an important contribution to our common transatlantic effort to shore up democratic institutions and undercut Russian interference and should continue to be supported.

The United States is uniquely positioned to take the lead on what may be one of the defining geopolitical challenges of our time. It is in our national security and economic interest. Twenty-eight years after George H.W. Bush’s speech in Mainz in 1989, we are undoubtedly further along in building a Europe whole and free and at peace. But threats we thought had been vanquished have return in full force, and partnership with our European allies is as important as ever. We at IRI look forward to continuing this important work and thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective with you.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you all very much.

#### U.S. ASSISTANCE

Mr. Surotchak, what signal would it be sending if the United States decided to cut the money we have available to combat Russia’s influence or to cut funding in terms of democracy development? How do you see that playing out for the United States?

Mr. SUROTCHEV. It would be precisely the wrong signal. In many conversations with our political friends and allies across the region, whether in Central Europe in the former Communist states or in Western Europe in the older democracies, there is, as you know, great fear of continued American retrenchment. Such a step would simply be seen as a further step down that road.

We need at this time more than ever to provide signals of support for our friends and allies and commitment that the United States remains engaged in the region. Only the United States can offer the balance that the countries that we are talking about here today need.

Senator GRAHAM. Who would be the biggest winner of such a retreat?

Mr. SUROTCHEV. The Russian Federation and extremist political parties in the countries we are talking about.

Senator GRAHAM. Dr. Jewett, from your point of view, does the money that we are spending make a difference and why is it a good investment for the American taxpayer to continue this funding?

LAURA JEWETT. It does make a difference. It is essential for the United States to be engaged in this region because the United States has played a leadership role and that role is needed. If the United States were to back away from that role, then this hybrid warfare would go unanswered and the vulnerabilities to the United States and Europe would be that much greater. The whole point of hybrid warfare is that the intention is to influence political outcomes in another country, but in a way that does not rise to the level of precipitating a military response. So to—

Senator GRAHAM. So is it fair to say that a budget cut in terms of prodemocracy funding would basically be withdrawing from the hybrid battlefield?

LAURA JEWETT. That is fair to say, yes.

#### U.S. RESPONSE TO RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Kara-Murza, what signal would it send, in your view, if America decided to forgive and forget what Russia and the Putin regime tried to do in our election, if we just moved on and did nothing, if we all believe, as I do, that Russia tried to interfere in our election, that they hacked in to the Democratic National Committee. John Podesta's emails were hacked by Russia and WikiLeaks was supplied information by Russia. While I do not think it changed the outcome, I think they certainly tried to interfere in our election.

If we just ignore this and move on, what kind of signal are we sending and how do you think that would play out?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman. Well, I think for too many years, for too long, the leaders of Western democracies have been just ignoring and moving on from what Mr. Putin has been doing, certainly in the very early years of Mr. Putin's rule. He has been careful when he began to dismantle, for example, democratic institutions in Russia or interfering in Russian elections, which of course they had been doing a long time before they started interfering in foreign ones.

And he was careful. He was watching for the reaction and there was none. And as you well know, U.S. administrations of different

parties have tried a friendly approach with Mr. Putin. President Bush was looking into his eyes and getting a sense of his soul. President Obama was engaging in a reset of relations with the Putin regime. And so I think the message they got was it is basically okay to carry on.

And we have been saying for years that it is only a question of time before this domestic repression will turn into external aggression and external interference because why should a government that disrespects and violates the rights of its own people and its own laws then suddenly start respecting international norms or the interests of other countries? There is no reason. And, of course, with time they began also doing things abroad, interfering in elections included. For example, in Ukraine in 2004, as everybody well knows. And, you know, why not go for the gold and why not try to interfere in the U.S. elections?

So I think for too many years Western democracies have been ignoring and have not taken, in my personal view, a stand that was not principled and not firm enough. And for Mr. Putin, you know his background. He is from the KGB. And for those people, accommodation and compromise is not an invitation to reciprocate, but it is a sign of weakness and it is a sign to be more aggressive. And that is what he has been—

Senator GRAHAM. Is it fair to say to forgive and forget would scream weakness to Putin?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. I'm sorry.

Senator GRAHAM. If we tried to—if we decided to forgive and forget, that would be screaming weakness to Putin?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Weakness, lack of any kind of will, I would think, and an invitation to carry on.

Senator GRAHAM. Would it invite further aggression?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. It certainly has done in the past. If you look at the track record of the last 17 years, everything he has done when his regime has not met principled reaction from Russian society and also from the international community. And again, I want to stress this. When Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov say do not interfere in our internal affairs, they are—you know, how can I say this most diplomatically? They are misspeaking because we are both members of the OSCE, both Russia and the United States. And the documents of the OSCE, the founding documents, clearly state, including the document passed, of all places, in Moscow in 1991. It is actually called the OSCE Moscow document. It is the one I quoted from in my opening statement. The question of human rights and political freedoms are not internal affairs.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, well said. So, is it fair to say on a positive note that based on what you see with young people in Russia it is just a matter of time before the Putin regime succumbs to its own excesses inside of Russia?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. I think there is no question about this. And frankly, I was—the day after these protests happened, I was asked by a journalist whether I was surprised by these protests. And I have to admit I was surprised by the scale—82 cities across the whole of the country. I think this is the biggest scale protest we have seen since the early 1990s. Even the big winter of protests 5 years ago after the rigged parliamentary elections.

Senator GRAHAM. Are people looking to us for support?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. I think people are not necessarily looking for support, but they are definitely looking for honesty and they are looking for Western democracies to abide by the principles that you preach, that you declare. For example, by not creating impunity for crooks and for human rights abusers, by not serving, you know, by not turning Western countries and Western financial systems into havens for those Kremlin officials who abuse the rights of the Russia people and who plunder their resources.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you very much.

Senator Leahy.

#### SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to follow up on what you just said. You mentioned earlier in your testimony the Magnitsky Act, the Rule of Law Accountability Act. Tell me a little bit more. How is that seen in Russia? What is the effect of it? Is it seen as effective or not effective?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. All right. Thank you for the question. It is a very important one. And when the Magnitsky Law was being debated and discussed in this Congress, and by the way, the first— one of the first decrees that Mr. Putin signed on his inauguration day, on May 7, 2012, was the request of the Foreign Ministry to stop the Magnitsky Act. That is how high on the priority list it is for the Kremlin.

And they have tried very hard to present the Magnitsky Act as sanctions in Russia, as sanctions on the Russian people, and they failed. And there was actually an opinion poll taken by the Levada Center at the end of 2012 soon after President Obama signed the Magnitsky Act into law which showed a strong plurality of Russians agreeing with the principles that those human rights abusers and those corrupt officials should not be able to travel to Western countries and keep their money there.

I mean, frankly it is very plain and a very simple principle, that those people who violate the most basic norms of the free world should not enjoy the privileges that the free world has to offer because that is a big difference between what we have now and what we had in the Soviet times.

There are many similarities that we discussed some of them earlier today: the political prisoners; the media censorship; the lack of free and fair elections. But there's one big difference, and that difference is that Soviet Politburo members did not send their kids to study in British schools. They did not buy real estates and yachts and properties in North America and Western Europe.

They did not keep their money in Western banks. People who are in charge of the Russian regime today do that and this hypocrisy and double standards has to stop. And the Magnitsky Act was a milestone towards stopping it. And this is why Boris Nemtsov, the late leader of the Russian opposition, called it the most pro-Russian law ever passed by any foreign parliament. And as that poll showed at the end of 2012, the strong plurality of the Russian people agree with him.

The Magnitsky law is not seen as sanctions against Russia. They are seen as individual sanctions on those people who abuse the

rights of Russian citizens. It was very heartening earlier this year to see General Bastrykin added to the Magnitsky list here in the United States.

#### CORRUPTION IN RUSSIA

Senator LEAHY. What about your judicial system? For example, do prosecutors ever bring charges of corruption against senior officials? And if they do, do the courts ever convict them?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. There are some showcases that are done to imitate the fight against corruption. Some of the cases there, of course, widely publicized in the state media. They are so small and they are so rare that we cannot speak of any kind of genuine fight against corruption and frankly, it is ridiculous to talk about fight against corruption within the present regime.

We have had corruption in Russia probably throughout our modern history. That is not—I am not saying any secrets here, but it has never been of the scale, magnitude, and of the level it has reached under Vladimir Putin. And, in fact, we have talked a lot today about these protests that took place over the weekend in Russia.

And, of course, as you know the reason, the immediate trigger for those protests was an independent investigation done by Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation that showed that the current Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, possesses luxury palaces, estates, vineyards, yachts, all of this worth more than a billion U.S. dollars. This is just only the stuff that was in the open. And there was no reaction and no response from this. Forget the courts and prosecutors. They did not even comment on it. And this is why the people came out in the streets because there is no other way to get their attention.

Senator LEAHY. It is interesting because I saw the pictures that they posted on social media and Russia just going click, click, click, showing all the properties he has.

But have they done anything similar to show some of the holdings that Mr. Putin has? Because he is a multibillionaire.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Well, actually 5 years ago, a little more now, just before the last big wave of protests in 2011, one of the people who was formerly associated actually with the Putin circle, his name was Sergey Kalashnikov. He is now living in exile. He published information about a billion U.S. dollar palace that was being built for Vladimir Putin on the shores of the Black Sea near a little town called Praskoveevka in the Krasnodar region of Russia.

He had Italian architects working for it, you know, lavish palace, lavish furniture, and he had photos of it, pictures. It certainly also was very impressive, Senator Leahy, if I could borrow your word.

This is just the tip of the iceberg and there have been suggestions, many suggestions, that Mr. Putin is in fact a multibillionaire, that he is probably the richest man in the world, and all these people that are officially on the Forbes list, you know, they are nothing compared to him. And one of the reports that Boris Nemtsov published was actually to do with Putin's wealth and the luxuries that accompany his life.

And this is also a direct result of the nature of the regime that we have in our country, a regime that does not depend on free elec-

tions, so he does not depend on the people. It has no checks and balances, no democratic institutions, no accountability, and it has proceeded with total impunity, including with regard to corruption, for almost two decades now. And this is why the people are getting fed up and this is why the young generation is getting fed up.

#### CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA

Senator LEAHY. Dr. Jewett and Mr. Surotchak, the Russian Parliament passed a law requiring civil society organizations to register as foreign agents, and it authorized the Justice Ministry to register them as foreign agents even without their consent. Aside from the concerns that might cause your organizations, how do the Russian people feel about it? Do they think you should be silenced that way?

LAURA JEWETT. I cannot speak to polling data on this issue, but I would say that the impact of this Foreign Agents Law that you are discussing, the impact that it has is to isolate Russians from the international community. Under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, all of us have a right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, including sharing information across borders. Russians share that right. They should be able to interact as they wish with representatives of the international community.

The Foreign Agents Law says that if you receive funding from an American organization you are a foreign agent, which equates to being a foreign spy. And it makes it very, very difficult for non-governmental organizations in Russia to do their work and to have contact with the international community.

Senator LEAHY. Do you feel the same way, sir?

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Thanks.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you. Thank all three of you for being here, but in particular, Mr. Kara-Murza, thank you for coming. And, you know, we in American politics, oftentimes I will hear a quote about something so politically courageous, somebody took a politically courageous vote on this or that or the other. In America, the worst things that happens to you if you do something that does not work out well, you lose an election, you get a bad editorial, you lose your position because you lose an election and you get to go work at a network as a paid analyst. That is the worst thing that happens to people here. In your case and in the case of many like you that are standing up to that reality in Russia, people die.

We had reports this week of an attorney, obviously very involved in human rights causes who, according to some Russian authorities fell, but according to most people who know about it, was pushed. Multiple stories and is, I believe, in very critical condition. And obviously it seems like every week now somebody related to Russia, sometimes diplomats and sometimes often opponents of the Putin government wind up dead, dead, not exiled even, dead, and oftentimes abroad. We recently saw a report of that in Ukraine.

So we have seen an incredible amount of reporting about public polling to the extent that it is accurate within Russia. And it shows that Vladimir Putin enjoys 80 percent approval ratings. My comment on that has always been if I controlled the media in this country, I would have 80 percent approval ratings too.

But what was interesting to me about this weekend is that the age and the geographic diversity of the people that took to the streets—a very young population, younger Russians. And it has been theorized that the rationale for that is that many of young Russians, like young Americans, do not get their news and information from official organisms of the government.

And I think this is a good question for the whole panel, but rather are getting their news from mobile devices, online, and from non-traditional sources. In essence, they are not—because they are not getting their news from the Russian organisms, they are getting a broader perspective of the world.

I ask that in the context of I have always argued to my colleagues that one of the ways we have to understand Vladimir Putin's actions in the world is his domestic policies. His fundamental argument to the Russian people is, "I am restoring Russia's greatness, but that is impossible without me. But look at us, we are now at the table once again on Syria, on all these other parts now increasingly, Libya apparently, and in other places." But that, for whatever reason, has not been enough for younger Russians.

So I would love to hear from all three of you about why it is that this weekend's protests were so unlike some of the protests we have seen in the past among much younger people. We also saw that video of students being confronted by a school principal, arguing with them about not joining these protests. What is happening with young Russians and what can we do without undermining them? Because it appears that our engagement is often used against them. They are accused of being tools of a foreign agent. On the other hand, we cannot stand silently by and silence our voices when we see oppression and peoples' dignity being violated.

So, what would you advise, and in particular, with regards to younger Russians who apparently at a minimum do not want to be isolated from the world and are certainly concerned about corruption, but also the fact that there is a Russian presence in East Ukraine and an increased presence in Syria which also has cost the lives of Russian servicemen.

#### STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA

So, the question to all three of you: what can we do to strengthen civil society in Russia without undermining it through our engagement; and what is happening with younger Russians that explains what we saw this weekend?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Could I begin?

Thank you, Senator Rubio. Thank you for the question. And if I could on a personal note, thank you very much for your message that you recorded when I was in a coma. I missed it because I was in a coma, but when I woke up—

Senator RUBIO. Did you see it after?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. I did.

Senator RUBIO. Good.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. My wife showed it to me because I was still in hospital in Moscow and thank you very much. I am very grateful. It is very important actually to know that people know and pay attention, and thank you.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.



Mr. KARA-MURZA. And your question is very, very important because, as I mentioned earlier, I was surprised by the scale of the protest and just the geography of it, but I was not really surprised about the demographics because over the past 3 years since we have been—since we have relaunched Open Russia and we have held many, many events around the country, public events, discussions, debates, roundtables, film screenings, and such. And every time the authorities try to prevent and sabotage and there is a fake bomb threat and the police arrives and whatnot.

But every time people still come and they still attend and they refuse to leave. And they are interested and they want to participate. And their self-awareness as citizens is stronger, is becoming stronger than the fear. And this is a very hopeful sign. And it is mostly by the young people.

And you are right. There are all these confrontations now in universities and schools and teachers and principals trying to say, “Why did you go out to these demonstrations? How much did the State Department pay you to go,” and all this nonsense. And they answer back. They explain why. And it is very, very heartening to see and to hear that because, again, this is the Putin generation, in quotation marks, of course. So this is generation born and raised under him and he is losing them.

This is the generation that trusts Twitter and YouTube much more than they trust Rossiya 1 or any other State controlled TV channels. They do not get their information, in fact, from Rossiya 1. They see that this regime is depriving them of the prospects. They see that Russia, thanks to the Putin regime, is becoming an international pariah and they are not happy about it. They want the same things as their counterparts in other Eastern European countries, for example.

And Mr. Putin likes to say he made Russia great again and restored it to the table. I am not sure what table he is talking about. For instance, it was because of his actions that Russia was suspended from the G8. I am not sure that that is very good. You know, Boris Yeltsin, who was supposedly this—this was a period of “humiliation” if you believe the Kremlin propaganda. He got us into the G8 and Putin got us suspended, so which one is better? And, you know, the fact that we are becoming a pariah for the whole world, I think that goes directly against Russian national interests.

And as to your question of what can the world do, first of all, to pay attention and not to fall for Mr. Putin’s line that Russia is only about him and about his regime and that there is nothing else. And this goes both for the positives and the negatives.

So, in terms of positives, to maintain lines of communications with other voices inside Russian society. Russia is so much bigger and so much more diverse than the Putin regime. And I would be very interested, for instance, to see if the upcoming visit by the new Secretary of State will include meetings with, for instance, civil society representatives alongside meetings with Kremlin officials.

But also, and I think this is the most important thing, practice the principles that you preach. And this is why the Magnitsky law is so important, because for years many Russians, including those

who oppose the Putin regime, have seen the West pay lip service, Western leaders pay lip service to human rights and other such issues, but happily welcome, for instance, the corrupt money the Putin honor guards were hiding in Britain and the United States and other countries. And thankfully, this process is being reversed now with the Magnitsky law and with other similar measures. It is very important to continue this.

And the most important thing is just to stay faithful to the values and to the principles on which your systems are based. I think that is the most fundamental thing.

LAURA JEWETT. Of course I agree with everything Vladimir said. I would just add that I think people have a visceral reaction to corruption. It gets at two things. It gets at issues of dignity and it gets at the pocketbook. And it tends to bring people out on the streets as this did.

In terms of what we can do, I stand by what Vladimir said. I would just add that young people in Russia, in NDIs experience, like young people everywhere, are thirsty to learn and thirsty for interaction with their peers around the world. So anything that we can do to facilitate that, that kind of interaction, those kinds of exchanges is helpful.

Mr. SUROTKHAK. Just very briefly, Senator. I think the irony is we look at the question of how young people respond to the political debate in our part of Europe, so in the neighboring states. One of the most disturbing trends is that it is precisely among young people that radical leftist and radical rightist non-democratic parties are doing best. And I think that is a very disturbing trend that we will keep an eye on.

We have just gotten some interesting polling data back in our Beacon Project, just for example, that suggests that 58 percent of the population in Hungary today would prefer to neutrality to their commitments under NATO or some sort of another relationship with Russia. And those numbers are even higher among young people. So it is an interesting sort of ironic division that we see evolving in the neighboring states.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy. I am so grateful that you have again convened an important hearing on this pressing issue and I am particularly grateful for our panel today. To Dr. Jewett, Mr. Surotkhak, and first among our witnesses, Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza, thank you for your courage and for your persistence. I thank you and your wife for coming forward again and again and for giving witness to this long pattern of violent repression of dissent in Russia, of the violation of basic commitments of democracy and law, and sadly, the practice of targeting political dissidents with tragic consequences.

As you remarked, Vladimir Putin won his first presidential election March 26, 2000, and just this week coinciding with the 17th anniversary of that, thousands of Russians, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets, including Alexei Navalny, an activist who defied bans on peaceful protests. These were some of the fiercest anti-Kremlin and anti-corruption protests in 5 years.

All of us in elected leadership in the United States and in other Western democracies should be clear in our response in con-

demning the detention of peaceful protesters and advocating for the core value of free speech and insisting that the Russian people deserve a government free of corruption and accountable under the rule of law.

In recent weeks, as others have remarked, we have seen Nikolai Gorokhov, the lawyer who represented Magnitsky, thrown from the fourth floor of his Moscow apartment. And just yesterday morning, two reporters for Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, were beaten and robbed by masked assailants in Southern Russia in an incident that appears to have been orchestrated by local police and is a reminder that members of civil society and journalists face a constant pressure across Russia.

Your pointed question to us was, “Do you choose to engage or to turn away?” And we have had conversations about the consequences of the proposed budget if it were enacted and the reasons why it should not be. I am grateful for a chance to join with Senator Rubio in a resolution naming the street in front of the Russian Embassy after Boris Nemtsov and I am particularly grateful for the strong leadership of our chairman, Senator Graham, in the Russian Sanctions Review Act and the countering Russian Hostilities Act, which are broadly bipartisan and deserve to be taken up and enacted.

#### RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE

Let me ask the entire panel if you would just speak for a moment to what Putin’s most effective tools are for meddling in the politics of the United States and other countries, and how can we best mitigate the impact of this Russian interference? How can we, to meet your question, best engage and actually fight back, to be more effective in partnering with the Russian people, in partnering with European allies, in partnering with a commitment by the United States to engage and push back?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much, Senator Coons, and I want to use this opportunity to thank you for cosponsoring this bill that would name the spot of land in front of the Russian Embassy here in Washington DC, Boris Nemtsov Plaza. It is very important for us because back home the authorities reject any suggestions for commemoration of his name. They rejected petitions and initiatives to put even a small sign or something like this. And, in fact, every night now, almost every night, the Moscow authorities and the Moscow, with the help of the police, remove, basically steal the flowers and the candles and the portraits of Boris Nemtsov that people leave at that bridge where he was killed 2 years ago.

They destroy this unofficial memorial almost every night. Of course, the following morning there are new flowers and new pictures and new icons and candles. People do not forget, so the popular memory lives on. But for now, we have no way of commemorating Boris Nemtsov in our own country, so we are very grateful for this initiative that you cosponsored along with Senator Rubio and I hope this succeeds and this will happen.

Of course, it was also the U.S. Congress that set this precedent with Andrei Sakharov Plaza back in the eighties. So I very much hope that this succeeds and we are very grateful for it.

On your question, I think one of the ways, one of the most effective ways that the Putin regime is trying to exert its influence is, frankly, through the export of corruption because unlike in the Soviet times, again, when everything was done by State actors. I mean, there was nothing private in the Soviet. Everything was connected to the State, so in a way, it was easier to see it. Now it is much more difficult.

And some of the things are not done by State actors directly, through affiliated entities, by supposedly “private businessmen,” but, of course, who does the Kremlin’s bidding. And they have done this for years and years. I mean, we do have some cases, as Mr. Surotchak mentioned, there was this multimillion euro loan from Moscow connected bank to the French Fronte Nationale, a far-right party. But these are rarer cases where we actually have open evidence. In most cases, it is clandestine. It is hidden. It is done through supposedly business schemes or offshores and things like this.

So I think the most effective way would be to put a stop to this export of corruption and to say that this is dirty money and this is money that, in fact, was plundered from Russian taxpayers. Because as Chairman Graham noted, Mr. Putin’s official salary has very little relation to all this massive wealth. So there is little doubt that this money is not legitimate and I think it is important that Western countries and Western financial systems not serve as havens for those monies that are also used in many cases to exert influence outside.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Doctor.

LAURA JEWETT. I would add that an effective response, I think, needs to start with an acknowledgement from the top of government and down to the grass roots that there is an urgent national security threat that is being faced. It has to be publicly acknowledged. There has to be a commitment to a public private collaboration to addressing it and a commitment to straightforward communication with the public about what is happening so that people can defend themselves and protect themselves from the assault.

We are seeing this kind of response in Estonia and Lithuania and Latvia. We are starting to see it in the Czech Republic. And I think those will be some of the most effective kinds of responses when there is that very public acknowledgement and agreement to collaborate.

Mr. SUROTCHAK. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

I would agree with both what Vladimir and Laura have added, but I would maybe make a couple of more points. It is extremely important to recognize it for what it is and to call it what it is and to work with political parties and leaders to give them the skills to get in front of the news cycle, get in front of the fake news stories.

The Lithuanian Government, I think very recently, in this story about alleged rape by German soldiers under a NATO flag is a great example of how government and the allies together can work to get ahead of a story and kill it before it becomes viral. Excuse me.

I would say also providing funding to NGOs who are finding a way to network political leaders together and enable them to share

their own experiences. Political party—it is remarkable to me in Europe today how few political party leaders have direct experience in understanding what the Russian Federation has undertaken in other countries. And if we can find a way to share those experiences among them that enables them to develop legislation to push back, for example, by limiting foreign funding of political party campaigns.

And I would say also to provide assistance where we can to foreign governments in their efforts to stand up to institutions to push back against Russian interference. For example, in the case of the Czech Republic, what has just been created in the Interior Ministry there on January 1 of this year is an interesting model. It may not be a perfect model, but it is a good model that could be replicated in governments across the region and we should encourage that.

Senator COONS. Well, Mr. Surotchak, Dr. Jewett, Mr. Kara-Murza, I just want to thank all of you.

Mr. Kara-Murza, you said in your introduction that you were poisoned by an undefined toxin. I appreciate your clarifying for us. You are defining the toxin with which Western democracy is currently being poisoned, which is a combination of corruption, of disinformation, of sustained hybrid warfare. Thank you for both your service and sacrifice and for helping make all of us stronger in the face of this toxin.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all very much for being here. I apologize for having had to miss some of the statements because I had other hearings going on.

#### RUSSIAN FAKE NEWS

But I want to pick up a little bit on some of the questions that Senator Coons was asking because the whole fake news disinformation campaign is what I find the most troubling because it is so hard to combat and so hard to recognize. And I think in the United States where we have not seen this before in quite the same way.

And we had former General Breedlove before the Armed Services Committee a couple of weeks ago. And one of the things he pointed out was that after the downed airliner over Ukraine, that Russia issued—was responsible for issuing four stories and two news cycles and it took the West 2 years to debunk those stories about who was responsible for that downed airliner.

And I think we have got to get much better at that. And so I wonder—I do not know. I do not necessarily think this is a government responsibility totally, but I think the leadership probably needs to come from government. And so I wonder if you all could share with us what you see being most effective to respond to some of this fake news. You talked a little bit about that, but can you elaborate further and talk about how you think a response could be structured in a way that could be effective—whatever.

LAURA JEWETT. So one of the things that we need to do is we need to understand exactly who is most impacted by this fake news. We know that it is not uniform across countries, that some people are more vulnerable to it than others are. So, in order to

have a strategic and effective response, we need to really understand what the impact is and very little research has been done on that so far. There is starting to be some, but there needs to be more. It needs to be comparative and rigorous.

And then there needs to be a whole array of responses designed to help protect people so ultimately the outcome will be that people can discern between real news and fake news and reject the latter.

So civil society groups, parties, journalists, editors, they need information, they need tools, and they need strategies so that they can do civic education campaigns, media, literacy campaigns, so that there can be more investigative journalism, so that students in schools are taught how to discern between reliable and unreliable information. There need to be norms and standards for the integrity of online discourse. There need to be corporate social responsibility campaigns.

There is a whole array of things that need to happen and there need to be a lot of public private collaboration in order for that to happen.

Senator SHAHEEN. So where would you start? What is the number one thing you think we ought to be thinking about doing? I like the Counter Russia Fund is an opportunity to provide some resources for those kinds of efforts.

Mr. SUROTCHAK. Oh, thank you. Thanks, Laura.

First of all, you know, we have made process in the fact that NATO is already addressing this as warfare. That is a big step forward. I do not think that that is necessarily recognized as broadly and deeply in the ministries of all of the NATO member countries. And we need—I think we have a role to play in making sure that that is understood more broadly and deeply and that response is made to it in the specific ministries.

I talked about Lithuania and the case there. If all the new member states had the kind of media response operation that the Lithuanian Defense Ministry had in that particular case and then along with it, the German Defense Ministry, we would be a great deal more insulated from these kinds of activities. So I think that is one thing that has to be invested in.

Another thing is in developing the assets in Ministries of Defense or Ministries of Interior around Europe, in Russian language skills. You know, after the Cold War, all the folks who used to do Sovietology went off to do other things. Those people are needed again and many governments, specifically the German Government, is going out and hiring those people again. That needs to be funded, supported, and encouraged.

And I think us also, and we are trying to help in this process through our Beacon Project, the European External Action Service needs to have its East StratCom effort fully funded by the European Commission. And I think that would actually go a long way to broadening the Europe wide response.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Senator Shaheen, if I may.

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes, please.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. It is a very important one. I think the best way to respond to propaganda, to deceitful propaganda, is frankly by the truth. And, Yevgeny Kiselyov, who was the face of Russian

television back in the nineties, he was the most prominent TV anchor. He is now lives and works in exile in Ukraine because for those Russian journalists who refused to become propaganda pawns, there is not much to do inside the country unfortunately.

So he is in Ukraine now and he commented once recently that the difference between Soviet television propaganda and current propaganda under Putin is that the Soviet propaganda machine took the facts and twisted them to suit its own interests. Putin's propaganda just makes up the facts. They just invent them, like the story of the crucified child by the Ukrainian forces in Slovyansk. It was nothing to that. That did not exist, and yet, it was shown primetime on channel 1 of Russian television. There were many such stories.

And I think the best way and the most effective way to answer that is with a counterstrategy in the media that would actually report about what is going on in the country, including the corruption, including the human rights abuses, including the election fraud, including just current affairs and news, but without the slant and without the lies and without the angle that the Kremlin is showing.

And before this hearing, I just looked up at some of the figures, and I looked, for instance, at the fiscal year 2017 congressional budget requests for the BBG, the Broadcasting Board of Governors. And if you combine their request for their RFE/RL Russian Service and Voice of America Russian Service—those are the two biggest outlets in the Russian language for the BBG. The combined request—and I am rounding up—it is about \$16 million for 2017. The budget for RT, or Russia Today, which is the Kremlin's propaganda outlet for foreign countries, is more than \$300 million, also for the year 2017. That is a factor of 20.

And I think it is important to pay attention to this because there are other ways of getting the information. And we have seen this, again, with these protests over the last weekend. If you watch Russian State TV, you would never hear Navalny's name. You, of course, would never hear about the corruption of the top officials. You would not hear about the palaces and vineyards of, be it of Medvedev or anybody else. But millions of people watched it on YouTube and tens of thousands came out across Russia to protest. So there are other ways.

And I mentioned in my opening statement that our own project run by Open Russia, which is called Open Media, which is supporting the media startups that raise awareness and cover the topics that are ignored or lied about by state media. And I think it is very important to work in this direction. We will certainly continue to work in this direction. And I think it is important to our friends and partners in the international community to work in this direction, including primarily by developing sources of information, of honest, objective information in the Russian language, be it here in the United States or in the European Union.

When the Government of Latvia held the presidency of the European Union a couple of years ago, it actually suggested creating a Europe wide television channel in the Russian language to counter Putin's propaganda, both for Russians inside and outside of Russia. Unfortunately, that never came to realization, but I think it is

those kind of ideas that offer the best way forward. Counter propaganda with the truth.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Lankford.

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Glad to be able to be here.

#### RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN ELECTIONS

Thank you very much for what you are doing and how you are doing it. I have a million issues for you and questions, and so I am going to try to narrow some of these down for you. One of them is dealing with the money to other elections and what you have seen Russia do and how they funnel money, so the process of how they are actually getting dollars to places to try to influence it, whether they be journalists or whether they be elected officials or to be directly to campaigns. How have you seen and what has been their technique?

Mr. SUROTCHAK. Senator, thank you for the question.

Vladimir mentioned earlier that, you know, unfortunately, one of the challenges we face here is that this is—that there are many channels and many different layers of cover that are applied to the various funding streams. The only one that we have a very good handle on is the case of the total of about 11 million euros that has been given to the Fronte Nationale in France. And that, in one case, was delivered as a loan through the First Czech Russian Bank, which is in Prague, and second, through a holding company based in Cypress that is affiliated with Marine Le Pen Front—

Senator LANKFORD. So is that just because they got sloppy at that time or how did we end up identifying that one or are we just getting at finding them?

Mr. SUROTCHAK. I think in that particular case the party and the candidate in France actually was willing to own it entirely because they viewed it as politically beneficial to them back in their own campaign in France. In the other cases, it is a great deal more difficult to uncover, and frankly, we do not have good evidence on other specific sources of funding, but there is lots of programming that is funded by Russian organizations that keeps extreme right and extreme left parties in Europe tied into Russian discussions and Russian processes.

Senator LANKFORD. Okay. Well, one of the challenges that is faced for civil society groups is obviously there are multiple different nations that are very passionate about seeing civil societies. This has been an ongoing issue for the United States for decades, and I am glad that it is, and it needs to be maintained in that way. That is part of the conversation today is how do we continue to focus on creating civil societies where individuals have the opportunity to be able to choose for themselves the destiny of their nation rather than it being imposed to them by authoritarian rule.

#### COORDINATION OF DONOR ASSISTANCE

The challenge to there though is when multiple nations all engage, and in our case, even multiple entities within the United States Government all start funding that, how do we fight against overlap? And in our case, as we have to look at in our own over-



sight, where multiple entities within the United States Government fund the same organization maybe for different reasons on that. How do we deconflict to be able to make sure that we are staying on track? As organizations, typically they are—I am not saying this in a negative way—they are money hungry to say, “We have got a mission. We want to accomplish it.” We don’t know where it comes from. We have to work on deconfliction as well.

LAURA JEWETT. Thank you for the question. I would just say that I see this multiplicity of donor sources as an advantage and a strength, despite the complications that you raise for civil societies which have a whole array of needs, some of them very complicated, having a pluralism of sources of support they can go to is for them a huge advantage.

And in practice, I think it is quite possible when there is a will for there to be communication and cooperation among all of these different sources.

#### RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN ELECTIONS

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Senator Lankford, thank you for the question. And it is much more complex and difficult today than it was in the Soviet times when, you know, you just had the Soviet Government, for instance financing Communist parties in Muslim countries or some terrorist organizations in the Middle East. It is much more difficult now.

And we do have a few cases which Mr. Surotchak mentioned, like the case the Fronte Nationale, some others less evidence, but this one is the best one we have. But these are very few and rare and mostly it is done through nonofficial channels with “private businesses” or entities acting with understanding on behalf of the Kremlin, not directly connected.

So I think as we discussed early during this hearing, it is very important to pay close attention generally to this dirty money, money connected with people involved in human rights abuse or involved with corruption in and around Putin’s regime. And it is important to be careful about letting this money into your countries and in Western countries and Western financial systems.

First of all, that is an honorable and principle thing to do anyway, but I think you would be also—it would be also effective and wise. And I would also just note that after the Soviet Union and the Soviet regime collapsed in 1991, in 1992 there was a trial or a process at the Constitutional Court of Russia against the Communist Party. And during that process, many documents were declassified from the Soviet archives, especially the Central Committee of the Communist Party Archive. And many of those documents actually related to financing of organizations and entities in foreign countries by the Soviet Government.

And, for instance, I remember there was a document shown that in 1989 the Soviet Government directed \$1 million to the U.S. Communist Party. I am not sure how wise an investment that was in 1989, but they did it.

So I think at some point in the future when some of the archives are opened relating to what is happening now under the Putin regime in Russia, I think we may still see a lot of interesting things. And I think some of it probably still is done in government.

## OVERSIGHT OF U.S. FUNDS

Senator LANKFORD. So history will tell. Now, let me ask an opposite question. Again, in our oversight role, we are very attentive to try to target towards entities and organizations that are promoting civil societies. The Russians want to create chaos wherever they can to be able to undermine democracy. There is always a concern with the number of organizations that are funded by the United States Government and the number of agencies that actually do that targeted funding, that some of that funding could also end up in the hands of an organization that is not fulfilling American's values that could be undermining democracy.

Now, I am not saying they are doing the bidding of the Russians, but they are not helping us to be able to communicate that. How do we help establish metrics and good oversight to make sure that the funding that is targeted towards outside NGOs or civil society organizations is actually accomplishing the purposes of promoting democracy and opportunities for individuals to have the opportunity to be a part of their nation rather than undermining that freedom?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you for this question also. And I think, first of all, there are organizations whose reputation and track record have no questions at all.

For example, the National Endowment for Democracy, which I already mentioned earlier in my opening statement. And I have to say, I mean, I am not connected to this organization in any way and I have never been involved with any projects with it, but I can tell you that it is an organization that does very important work, very valuable work in support of political rights and political freedoms in the rule of law and human rights in Russia.

It continues to support, despite all the obstacles that have been put out by the Putin government in the last few years. I mean, it has been declared an undesirable organization. They passed a special law for this. It was the first one, I believe, to be declared undesirable. And if you are undesirable, it means that you cannot operate in Russia at all. That is what they did.

But it continues the work. I mean, there are many opportunities and many projects that you can do for Russian citizens outside of Russia. For instance, like training seminars and other such things. And there are things it continues to do in Russia through partners, through longtime partnerships that they had with Russian NGOs.

And I would just say those organizations that have proven their reputation for many, many years, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, such as both of the party institutes represented at this hearing, which have also been, both of them, declared undesirable organizations and are now on the Russian Justice Ministry list. Those organizations whose record is unblemished and unquestionable for many years, I think they deserve continued support.

And if those organizations have the support reduced and undermined, I think that would, going back to your question, Mr. Chairman, send exactly the wrong message.

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you.

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Surotchak, could you come in on this?

Mr. SUROTCHAK. Very briefly. Two points. I think we need to be very focused on the fact that different organizations have different target audiences. And I think sometimes we make a mistake by confusing, for example, through all of support for political parties and political party development and the role of support for civil society. Unfortunately, when you conflate the two, neither the political parties in the countries that we work in, nor the civil society ends up fully understanding its role.

So I think it is important to choose implementers that are focused on their priority partner organizations, and secondly, and more importantly, transparency. All right. We have to have full clarity about where the funding source, what the funding sources for our work are and where they go in the field. And organizations like IRI and NDI and, of course, the National Endowment for Democracy, of course, you know, deliver that kind of transparency.

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that and I would look forward to in the days ahead providing some level of transparency like that for the American taxpayer dollars that are going out and the effectiveness and the metrics and how that works because I think we need to be engaged in places to be able to share that value, but I also want to make sure that we are watching those dollars to make sure those organizations are actually either accomplishing it and also accomplishing what we hope they would.

Senator GRAHAM. I could not agree with you more. We talked about the triangle countries, but this is a constant theme you bring up and I think you are right to bring it up. The more we can justify the money we spend and what we get for our money, the more money will be available to us. And so we will continue this discussion.

Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to start by thanking the chairman of this subcommittee for the measures that he has taken to respond to aggression from the Putin regime around the world as well as actions he has taken on a bipartisan basis to respond to the Putin's regime's interference in our elections. And I think you made a very good point that it is important that we always distinguish between actions of the Putin regime and the will of the Russian people because we have somebody who is not an elected leader. We cannot pretend that he represents the will and the views of the Russian people. I think that is a really important distinction to continue to make.

Dr. Jewett, thank you and your work at NDI. Mr. Surotchak, thank you for the work you do at IRI. And, of course, Mr. Karamurza, thank you for your courage, your leadership, and your wife. And I want to also reflect the views that my other colleagues have said with respect to the real risks you take. We are fortunate that you are here with us today.

I do want to explore a little bit the effect, the comments of both Candidate Trump and now President Trump are having in Russia and the extent to which Vladimir Putin uses those comments to his own purposes. And I make those comments because not only do we know that Putin interfered in our election, but Putin, according to

all of our intelligence agencies, weighed in in favor of the election of Donald Trump.

And I want to make it clear. I am not arguing that that made the difference in the outcome, but it clearly shows the intent of where Vladimir Putin and his regime are. And here are some of the things that Candidate Trump said.

On April 12, 2014, he said of Putin, and I quote, “He could not have been nicer. He was so nice and so everything, but you have to give him credit for what he is doing for that country in terms of their world prestige is very strong.”

On December 18, 2015, Donald Trump compared Putin to President Obama saying that Putin is the strong leader.

On December 20, 2015, when asked whether he, Candidate Trump, condemned Putin’s killings of journalists and political opponents, Donald Trump said, “But in all fairness to Putin, you are saying he killed people. I have not seen that. I do not know that he has. Do you know the names of the reporters that he has killed?”

On February 6—well, on September 7, 2016, Donald Trump said in a town hall, “If he says great things about me, I am going to say great things about him. I have already said he is really very much of a leader.”

And this defense of Putin continued after the election. On February 6, 2017, President Trump defended Putin when Bill O’Reilly called him a killer, saying, “There are a lot of killers. Do you think our country is so innocent?” That was the response of President Trump.

I worry very much about this false equivalence that President Trump has created between the United States and Russia under Vladimir Putin. I would be happy to supply President Trump with the names of people who have been killed by this regime. We heard many today, Boris Nemtsov and many others.

We have also seen Vladimir Putin using some of these comments and even picking up the phrase “fake news” to try discredit legitimate criticism aimed at the Putin regime.

#### ROLE OF U.S. IN COUNTERING RUSSIAN INFLUENCE AND AGGRESSION

So, Mr. Kara-Murza, could you talk a little bit about how comments made by American leaders have been used by Vladimir Putin to serve his own interests?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much, Senator Van Hollen, for this question.

First of all, the Putin regime certainly is interested in international legitimacy and international legitimization. It has been the case for many years. It still even is the case today. Despite the—just the levels of the repression that they have gone to, they still would like to be accepted by the international community. And so I think it would not be very useful for Russia and I do not think it would be in Russia’s national interests—meaning the country and not the regime—to legitimize Vladimir Putin’s regime.

It is important to be open and clear and honest about what this regime is, that this is not the product of democratic elections, that it is not a democratic government. It is not based on the checks and balances or the institutions that are, for instance, provided in

the Russian Constitution, but are not—have not been active for many years.

I would also say this, and I think this is a very important point. It is not the job of Mr. Trump or Ms. Merkel or Ms. May or anybody else among the Western leaders to effect political change in Russia and we never would ask them to. It is only our job and our task. It is the task for Russian citizens and the Russian opposition. And we certainly do not ask for regime change. We do not ask for any political support. These are the Kremlin propaganda points supposedly. Of course, that really is fake news.

What we do ask for, the only thing, in fact, we ask for from our friends in the international community, including the leaders of the democratic countries, is that you are honest and open about what is happening in our country, that you recognize and call things for what they are, and that you stay true to the values and principles of which your systems are based. And if your systems are based on the rule of law and in respect to human rights, it probably is not very good to accept, for instance, the money that are the product of corruption and human rights abuse.

For years and years and years now, the people, you know, the people close to Putin, the operatives and the leaders of the current regime, have used Western countries and Western financial systems as havens for their money, for their families, for their investments. Even in this anti-corruption investigation done by Navalny with regard to Medvedev which was followed by these mass protests over the weekend, not all of these properties are in Russia, for example. Some of them are in Italy. And it is not news that Western countries have been favored destinations for some of these crooks and human rights abusers. And this should stop, frankly, because this is hypocrisy and this is double standard.

So we are not asking, God forbid, Western leaders to interfere in any way in our political process. We are not asking you to do a regime change or to effect change in our country. This is for us to do, and we will do this. All we ask you is to stay honest and open and call things for what they are.

#### FALSE EQUIVALENCIES

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right. Thank you. And I am assuming you would agree that it is false equivalence to draw a comparison between the democratic system in the United States with all its imperfections, but nevertheless, a system devoted to democracy and personal freedom, that it is a false equivalence to compare that system with what we see in Putin's Russia today.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Absolutely. And it has actually been a long held tool of the propaganda going back to Soviet times to try to pretend there is equivalence. And whenever they heard, you know, the Soviet leaders or people in Putin's regime today, when they hear criticism about the human rights situation, they always say, "But, you know, you are the same or you are worse."

And there is this really Orwellian sounding new position of the Russian Foreign Ministry. There is a guy called Delgov. He is a representative for human rights, rule of law, democracy, something like this. And every year they produce a report detailing all these horrible human rights abuses in countries like Canada or the U.K.

or Belgium, some of the worst human rights abuses you ever heard of. And, I mean, it is funny and ridiculous for us, but this is their line, that everything is the same, that these guys are just as bad as us.

So when we say that it is important to practice the principles that you preach when we talk with our Western counterparts about this, it really is important because do not give them any excuses to do this, but also when they are saying these things, be ready to call them out for what it really is. Yes. So, absolutely. I do not think there is any equivalence between a system of government based on the rule of law and democratic elections and a corrupt autocracy that is Vladimir Putin's regime when, as I mentioned earlier, we have not had a more or less free and fair election in our country in 17 years.

I still remember the time when we had elections in our country that meant something. A lot of these youngsters that came out to protest last Sunday do not. For them, it is something out of a history book, and we should really keep that in mind.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you for being here to tell the truth, even at great personal risk.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you. I think, Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. And again, thank you all very much for being here.

I just had another question that you may have responded to earlier, but what—as you look at the future—I think this is probably particularly for Mr. Kara-Murza—how do you see organizing in Russia for the future? I mean, I assume the space for political dissent is much narrower than it has been. You talked about the 17 years since there was a real election. So, and we have seen so many NGOs expelled from Russia and the kind of civil society building and support that has gone on there is no longer—no longer exists.

#### PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA

So how do you think things evolve in a way that begin to change for people in Russia to be freer and have more opportunities for expression and access to information and participation in a democratic process?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much, Senator Shaheen, for this question.

I think, again, there are two sides to this. One is kind of the side that everybody sees, the official one. It is the restrictions and the blacklisting and the foreign agents law and the undesirable law and all these crackdowns and repressions on any kind of organized civic activity. It really is anything. I mean, they are afraid of—it is not just—this is also important to say, I think. It is they are not just concerned about the regime that is about independent political activity, but about any kind of independent civic activity.

I mean, for instance, now there is—as we speak, there is protest action going across Russia of long haul truck drivers who are protesting against new tariffs that are being imposed on them. This is not explicitly political. They do not, for now, at least, have any political demands, but the authorities are certainly very unhappy about this. They are unhappy about anything that is beyond their

control. And in the last few years they have passed every single kind of law and imposed every kind of restriction on this activity. This is one side.

But the other side is really the one that gives us hope and that, you know, for the sake of which we continue our work. And it is the people, the people of Russia, and across the country. And as I mentioned, in my capacity as Vice Chairman of Open Russia, I have traveled across the whole country basically in the last 3 years. I have made it as far as Vladivostok. But certainly from Leningrad to Chaykovsky. You know, from the Baltic to the Bakal. And we have had events in many different cities and events, public events, debates or discussions or lectures or round tables or film screenings to try to maintain that space for political discussion that is being squeezed and shrunk.

And back a few years ago, Boris Gryzlov, was then speaker of the Russian Parliament, he was one of the leaders of the United Russia Party led by Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev. He said his famous phrase infamous, "Parliament is not a place for discussion." He is on the record of saying this.

And it is not just a Parliament. It is there are fewer and fewer places for discussion in Russia generally and we try to account to that and we try to maintain and where we can expand this space for public discussion, be it through media projects or through actually holding those events on the ground in Russia.

And every time, as I mentioned, the authorities try to sabotage and prevent us from going ahead. You know, they send the police to storm the buildings to evacuate everybody. There are fake bomb threats. The electricity would go off. And so, but people always come and they always attend and they are always interested. And we have never yet had anyone cancel because of this. We had to try to find a different place. We had to hold events on the street. We have held one at a swimming pool once in Novosibirsk. We do it anyway. That is okay. But the people come and they participate and they are interested. And it is that, I think that is much more important than all those artificial restrictions.

And if you look again at the protests that happened last Sunday, most of those protests were "unsanctioned" which violates Article 31 of the Russian Constitution which guarantees freedom of assembly, not to mention international documents, but the local police and local authorities said, "No, these actions are not authorized. You are not allowed to come out." And people still came out in tens of thousands across the country. And they were met by riot police and the National Guard and so on, but they still came and I believe they will continue to come out.

And this is really the biggest source of hope for the future, I think, for the future of Russia because this coming generation, this young generation, is realizing increasingly that this regime is a dead end for Russia, that it is depriving them of prospects and future and of opportunities. And there is really nothing much Mr. Putin can do about that, especially given that this is the face of tomorrow, the young generation. And I think that is the most important thing.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you very much and I hope you will take back the message that there are those of us in Congress

in a bipartisan way who continue to support your efforts and hope that you will be successful and are here to do everything we can to help you.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Van Hollen. Well, thank you. You have been excellent. Just my observations and we will wrap it up. We got here in a bipartisan way.

I have talked to President Bush personally about this, and he thought it was a miscalculation in terms of looking into Putin's soul, that he regrets that. He openly talked about that not long ago. He miscalculated the man in front of him and all I can say about President Obama in the debate with Romney, that Romney was more right than Obama about Russia: the reset has not worked.

Providing more flexibility after the election did not get us to where we wanted to go, so we are where we are from miscalculation to naïve. And I worry about the Trump Administration empowering Russia, and I do not want that. When I hear Secretary Tillerson speaking out in support of the people in the streets that is encouraging. I know where Secretary Mattis is at in terms of Russia being a threat, General Dunford. I think I know where the Congress is, as well.

We are together. We got here together in terms of allowing Russia to get powerful, Putin, at our expense collectively and I think we will only get out of this collectively pushing back. I will urge Secretary Tillerson when he goes to Russia to meet with opposition leaders and people who are NGOs who have been on the front lines of battle.

So, let it be said that we have all made mistakes and we are not going to fix them until we address the problems we have created and let it start with sanctions against Russia. They did interfere in our elections. They did not change the outcome, but they definitely interfered. I can say this about Russia: it does not matter if you are right or left. If they think they have an advantage supporting you, they will. Trump could be next. If he pushes back, they will turn on him.

The bottom line is I do believe German Chancellor Angela Merkel is in the crosshairs of this. The more we talk about it in America in terms of what they are trying to do to democracy in Europe, the better off we are. So I want to issue a challenge to the Senate. It is important we act before the French elections.

It is absolutely important at a minimum we have a markup in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee regarding a bipartisan bill that would sanction Russia for interfering in our election and trying to upend democracy throughout the world. It is vital that we actually have a Senate debate and pass a sanctions bill to put on the President's desk punishing Russia for what they did in America to help our friends in Germany. By September I hope we can come together in the House and the Senate and put a bill on the President's desk that he will sign to let Russia know that we did not forgive and forget and to let our European allies know that we stand with them when it comes to the threats they face.

This is a defining moment for democracy throughout the world. We will not cut this budget without one hell of a fight. If it is up



to me, we are going to spend more because the more we spend now, the safer we will be later. And the more hearings we have like this, the easier it would be to justify the involvement by America because we see what happens when Republicans and Democrats misjudge Putin. I do not want to continue what I have seen for the last 12 years. I want to change it. I want to urge our President to keep an open mind about the guy he is dealing with.

Putin is not a friend of democracy. He is not a friend of America. And above all else, he is not a friend of Russia. If you really cared about the people that you are governing, you would not steal them blind. If you really thought you were secure in your ideas, you would not have to kill people who challenge them. We are going to push back and we are going to push back hard. And your presence here today is part of that pushback.

#### ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

Thank you all. The subcommittee record will remain open until Friday for further questions.

On April 25, we are going to take up the President's fiscal year 2018 budget request for the 150 account with outside witnesses and on May 9 we are going to have a hearing on democracy programs.

[The following questions were not asked at the hearing, but were submitted to the witnesses for response subsequent to the hearing.]

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA

##### QUESTION SUBMITTED BY SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM

*Question.* How can the U.S. be most helpful?

*Answer.* Most importantly, by being honest about what is happening in Russia and by staying true to your principles. Do not treat Vladimir Putin as a desired international partner. Do not enable the export of corruption—political or financial—from Mr. Putin's regime to the West. Do not extend a welcome to those who abuse the rights of, and steal from the Russian people. It is particularly important in this regard to continue implementing the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, which provides for targeted visa and financial sanctions against individuals responsible for gross human rights abuses in Russia. Those who violate the basic norms of the democratic world should not be allowed to enjoy its privileges. It is also very important that the U.S. does not equate Russia with Vladimir Putin's regime—rhetorically or in policy. For example, it is counterproductive—as well as a gift to the Kremlin's propaganda—to refer to restrictions imposed on Russian state actors in connection with their actions in Ukraine or with cyber-attacks as “sanctions on Russia.” It should be made clear that these measures target Vladimir Putin's unelected regime, not the Russian people. And, while maintaining a principled stand with regard to the Kremlin, it is important for the U.S. to continue an active engagement and dialogue with Russian civil society. This dialogue can serve as an important foundation for future cooperation between our countries.

##### QUESTION SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRISTOPHER A. COONS

*Question.* Since 2011, there has been an estimated drop of 45 percent in the number of American students studying in Russia. What is the value of people-to-people exchanges in countering Russian influence and what is its relation to public diplomacy?

*Answer.* People-to-people exchanges provide an opportunity to look beyond the current political situation (and the current political regime in Russia) and lay the foundations for a long-term relationship between American and Russian societies based on mutual understanding and trust. Human interaction and exposure to each other's culture and language go a long way in refuting the myths and stereotypes created by the Kremlin's propaganda. Political education is an area of particular im-

portance in this regard. During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Open Russia organized a trip by a group of Russian pro-democracy activists and campaign volunteers to the United States so that they may get first-hand knowledge of the American democratic process. A strategy based on people-to-people exchanges—with a special focus on young people—can build bridges between the next generations of political and economic leaders in the United States and Russia and prepare the groundwork for future cooperation. It is the best long-term investment in an improved relationship between America and Russia.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO LAURA JEWETT

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM

*Question.* What would a one-third reduction in the 150 foreign assistance budget mean for democracy assistance?

*Answer.* A cut of that magnitude would gravely blunt one of the most cost-effective foreign policy tools we have. Hybrid warfare would go unanswered and the United States and Europe would become far more vulnerable to these threats.

Unaccountable governments give rise to corruption and instability and often become havens for extremism and terrorism. It is in our interest to help build resilient democratic institutions that respond to the aspirations of their citizens and serve as foundations for reliable partnerships with the United States.

*Question.* How can we ensure that democracy assistance programs align with U.S. foreign policy objectives and that taxpayer funds are being spent responsibly?

*Answer.* To ensure that democracy assistance is strategic and effective, the U.S. Government—including the White House, State Department, Congress, and overseas embassies—can set the tone and provide needed resources. At the same time, much of the day-to-day democratic development work should be carried out, with proper oversight, by nongovernmental organizations, which operate in the realm of people-to-people relations. Such mission-driven groups often have pre-existing, global relationships and are not constrained by the stringent rules of formal diplomacy. They also often provide value-for-money in comparison with for-profit organizations. Most important, in countries where a primary issue is the paucity of autonomous civic and political institutions, the very idea that government should not control all aspects of society can be undermined by a too visible and too direct donor government hand.

Pluralism in democracy assistance has served the United States well, allowing for diverse yet complementary programming that, over the long term, could not be sustained by a highly static and centralized system. As a practical matter, people making a democratic transition require diverse experiences and expertise, along with broad peer support, so it is appropriate and beneficial for programming to be implemented by a range of credible organizations. In NDI's experience, proactive coordination among these groups and their respective donors maximizes effectiveness and prevents duplication. Transparency and accountability in the use of tax dollars are also paramount.

Pluralism among donors is also advantageous. For example, funding by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has allowed the Endowment and its four core institutes to plan strategically, yet respond quickly and flexibly to emerging opportunities and sudden problems in rapidly shifting political environments. In addition, the NED has been able to operate effectively in closed societies where direct government engagement is more difficult. USAID has provided the basis for longer-term commitments in helping to develop a country's democratic institutions. The State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and other programs within the Department, such as the Middle East Partnership, have given the U.S. Government the capacity to support—without cumbersome regulations—cutting edge and highly focused democracy initiatives for individual countries, as well for regional and global initiatives.

One of democracy's central tenets is the right of all citizens to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. This in turn depends on pluralism among civil society and political parties, credible elections, and genuinely representative governing institutions. These principles have informed U.S. democracy assistance objectives over the past three decades, if not longer, and should continue to shape policy going forward. Democracy assistance is not about who wins an election, but who gets to decide. This right belongs to the citizens of the country. For this reason, NDI has always worked with a broad spectrum of "small d" democratic parties and political movements, from left of center to right of center.

*Question.* How can the United States be most helpful?

*Answer.*

- Acknowledge that hybrid warfare is the threat to global security that it is.
- Commit to supporting the democracy and sovereignty of Ukraine and Georgia, because democratic success in these countries would reverberate throughout the region. Failure would be a victory for authoritarian aggression.
- Focus on four baskets of responses:
  - Reinforcing transatlantic alliances and reaffirming democratic principles.
  - Strengthening democratic institutions in the affected countries. This is the first line of defense.
  - Helping governments develop whole-of-government counter-strategies. This cannot be left to civil society. Governments need to enlist public-private collaboration.
  - Helping CSOs, parties and journalists access information, tools and strategies to help themselves and each other.

*Question.* What can we in Congress do to support you and the CSOs and local partners with whom you work?

*Answer.* Congress has a critical role to play by remaining engaged; holding more hearings; visiting the affected countries; meeting with political and civic leaders visiting from those countries; raising these issues in public forums; and continuing to defend democracy, our alliances, and our foreign assistance.

*Question.* Why is this the United States' responsibility?

*Answer.* In this interconnected and interdependent world, what happens for good or bad within the borders of states has regional and, sometimes, global impact. We have a direct interest in how people live and how they are treated by their governments.

Our ultimate foreign policy goal is a world that is secure, stable, human and safe, where the risk of war is minimal. Most of the violent crises around the world erupt in nondemocratic places.

So supporting democracy aligns with our hard security interests. But we should not and need not do this work alone. Many other governments, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs around the world are engaged in democracy assistance and, increasingly, the response to hybrid warfare. This community includes the British, Swedes, Norwegians, Canadians, Slovaks, Estonians, and the Swiss, as well as the EU and the OSCE, to name just a few of the non-U.S. players on this field.

The more we can work together on these issues, the better.

#### SUBCOMMITTEE RECESS

The subcommittee stands in recess subject to call of the Chair.  
 [Whereupon, at 4:21 p.m., Wednesday, March 29, the subcommittee was recessed, to reconvene subject to the call of the Chair.]