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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Plus ça change...

President Vladimir Putin has developed an interesting response when called upon to answer for a questionable action by his administration. He used it when asked about the American held for espionage, Edmund Pope. Recently, in the Gazprom/Media-MOST scuffle, Putin used it again. It is a legal matter and the courts must decide, Putin told former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (a member of NTV's advisory council). (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 0800 PDT, 9 Apr 01; via C-afp@clari.net) Even he can't interfere in a dispute that needs legal remedy. So far, this has proven a remarkably effective evasive tactic. It allows for the appearance of wise presidential governance through democratic institutions, and distances Putin from the participants in the controversy. It is, however, only an illusion.

The judicial system in Russia is still so weak that it can be manipulated easily by political authorities, and despite Putin's appeals to let the system work, it provides only a thin veil of legitimacy through which the personalization of political decision-making is still visible. Putin may believe that bouncing the ball into the judiciary's court is a reasonable way to slough off responsibility for the government's interference with independent media, but that does not prevent observers from noticing that it is Putin's chosen ministers, advisers and associates who are driving this scandalous operation. Mikhail Lesin, the press minister who signed off on the shares-for-amnesty extortion deal with Vladimir Gusinsky, retains his position in the government. The chairman of Gazprom's Board of Directors is Dmitri Medvedev, one of Putin's most trusted aides and a deputy in the Kremlin administration. The two officials installed by Gazprom to
run Media-MOST, Alfred Kokh and Boris Jordan, are well-known from the privatization scandals of the previous administration and are thought to be close to UES Chief Anatoli Chubais. (PROFIL, Apr 01; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis)

The "Family" of the Yel'tsin era survives. Under Putin, some members have been disowned and others brought to greater prominence, but the practice remains the same: A small coterie of influential individuals still drives policy formulation and implementation. And the courts are in no position to rule on the constitutionality of that arrangement.

**What price freedom? $3 million**

Former Kremlin manager and current secretary of the Belarus'-Russian Union, Pavel Borodin, arrived in Switzerland Saturday, 7 April, to face charges of money laundering and membership in a criminal organization (the Kremlin administration?). Borodin previously had been held in jail in the United States awaiting extradition. At a bail hearing, Borodin was formally charged only on the money-laundering scheme which involved kickbacks from construction companies during the Kremlin renovation. Despite the efforts of the Swiss prosecutors to have Borodin held until the trial, the Swiss court set bail at $3 million.

Borodin's bail was promptly paid by the Russian consulate in Geneva, with loan guarantees from the Russian government. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 1020 PDT, 12 Apr 01; via C AFP@clari.net) A spokesman from the Russian government claimed to be upholding "the principle that a Russian citizen whose guilt is not proven should not remain in prison." That principle apparently obtains only outside of Russia.

The Swiss prosecutor, Bernard Bertossa, was under "no illusions" that he will have another opportunity to question Borodin in the matter given that Russia has no extradition treaty with Switzerland and is unlikely to cooperate with any further
investigation. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 0850 PDT, 13 Apr 01; via C-afp@clari.net) If default on the bail money is believed a foregone conclusion, it would be interesting to learn just exactly what makes Borodin such a valuable asset to Russia.

GOVERNMENT
More dismissals expected
President Putin's recent personnel changes in his security and defense teams are widely assumed to be just the first stage of a more sweeping reshuffle of his cabinet. While rumors have been nearly constant about the impending departure of Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov since his appointment, no clear successor has appeared. There may still be a factional struggle within Putin's inner circle over the new appointments and control over economic policy.

Recently, Kasyanov has been criticized for his handling of negotiations to have Russia's debt burden eased in the West. Another member of the government, Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Kudrin, however, has met with some success in his attempts to secure debt relief. The Russian delegation to the London Club, led by Kudrin, announced a restructuring deal that will result in creditors writing off 36.5% of Russia's debt. (NOVYE IZVESTIA, 14 Apr 01; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis) Kudrin's debt relief negotiations were clearly assisted by an optimistic prediction by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which forecast a growth of 4.5% of Russia's GDP in 2001.

One likely move is the replacement of the current foreign minister, Igor Ivanov. As "Kremlin sources" told Kommersant (cited in AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 0400 PDT, 12 Apr 01; via C-afp@clari.net), "Igor is tired. He travels too much without results." The sources also revealed that the president has already spoken with Ivanov about his resignation. The changing status of the Security Council, with the appointment of Sergei Ivanov to the defense ministry, suggests that the council will have less of a role in foreign policy questions. If the foreign ministry is
to assume the front line in foreign policy, Putin will likely want his own appointee instead of Yevgeni Primakov's former deputy.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Luba Schwartzman

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY
Reduce, reuse and recycle?
Before former Nuclear Power Minister Yevgeny Adamov was replaced by Alexander Rumyantsev there was a flurry of arguments about a bill on the import of treated nuclear waste. The amendments contained in the bill would allow Russia to import 20,000 tons of spent fuel for reprocessing and storage over a period of 12 years, and to be paid $20 billion for this service. The nuclear power ministry, the Russian State Duma Committee for Environmental Protection and members of the Russian Academy of Sciences support the bill, arguing that the amendments would "give Russia a real opportunity to cope with the problems of storing, burying and recycling its own nuclear waste." They recognize that it is "psychologically difficult" for a country "which has lived through the Chernobyl tragedy" to approve legislative acts that permit [Russia] to bring used nuclear fuel from foreign nuclear power plants even for temporary storage or processing," but maintain that the bill must be approved "without delay." (ITAR-TASS, 1846 GMT, 6 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0406, via World News Connection)

Opponents, most notably members of environmental groups, but also, according to polls, the population at large, stress Russia's inability to handle the processing safely, assert that money earned will be misused, predict another Chernobyl and resent Russia's possible role as "the world's nuclear waste dump." According to one deputy, Yevgeny Ishchenko, rumors floated around in the Duma that the
nuclear power ministry had cut deals with lawmakers to support the bill: The Communist Party, for one, was said to have accepted $15 million for its unanimous vote in the first reading of the bill, in September of 2000. (THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 30 Mar 01; via www.stpetersburgtimes.com, and THE MOSCOW TIMES, 6 Apr 01; via www.themoscowtimes.com)

When Rumyantsev stepped in (Adamov became the only minister not to receive another appointment in the reshuffle), he promised to assess the situation. (INTERFAX, 1611 GMT, 28 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis) Opponents of the bill, however, did not take his promise seriously. A former high-ranking official at the nuclear safety watchdog Gosatomnadzor and current director of the Russian Green Cross program for nuclear safety, Vladimir Kuznetsov, said that Rumyantsev was unlikely to make any meaningful changes to Adamov's policies, since "they are both from the same team." He also criticized the new nuclear power minister as "lacking in strong management skills. He has failed to raise money to dispose of radioactive waste on his territory," Kuznetsov said. "Look, he has 2,000 tons of radioactive waste and 900 rods with spent liquid nuclear fuel that are kept in mostly unsafe conditions on the two hectares of area that the institute controls. Some of the storage facilities are just large pits in the ground!" (THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 30 Mar 01; via www.stpetersburgtimes.com)

The second reading of the bill, scheduled originally for 22 March but delayed until 18 April 2001, was deemed by another environmentalist, Lyudmila Alexeeva, head of the Moscow Helsinki human rights group, to be "a test of the relationship between the ruling powers and society in our country." She suggested that "if this bill is passed, then it will mean that we aren't voters, taxpayers or citizens -- we are just scum to them." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 22 Mar 01; via www.themoscowtimes.com)
In this struggle, however, Russian environmentalists are unlikely to get much help from their colleagues abroad, in whose interest it is to stow the nuclear waste as far away as possible.

SECURITY SERVICES

Hacker with a conscience

Fortunately for a Moscow student known as Vers, an espionage agent who turns himself in voluntarily is guaranteed immunity. According to Moskovsky komsomolets, the 20-year-old hacker first established contact via the Internet with US Air Force Colonel (Ret.) William Smith a year and a half ago. He had bragged to the American about his hacking skills -- and after mentioning that he needed money and wanted to travel to America and use his computer skills, he was alleged to have been contacted by two officers from the US embassy's security service and two FBI agents, with whom he supposedly met three times between 16 and 23 January. The embassy officials allegedly offered the young Russian $10,000 to break into the Federal Security Service (FSB) computer network, but after a sleepless night he surrendered to authorities. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 11 Apr 01; via www.themoscowtimes.com, and INTERFAIX, 10 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis) This report represents yet another stage in the Russian press campaign concerning alleged spying.

When life gives you lemons...

Another Russian citizen, however, was not lucky enough to turn himself in on time. There are any number of ways in which Edward Savenko (nom de plume, Limonov) has offended the powers that be. He is the head of the ultranationalist National Bolshevik Party, the author of several controversial books, editor of an anti-establishment newspaper Limonka (in Russian, slang for hand grenade), columnist for Moscow's alternative and often scandalous biweekly, the eXile, and a generally insolent public figure. The possible motivations are countless; the allegation is that he attempted "to illegally acquire large quantities of firearms and explosives." This accusation actually was wielded against several members of
the National Bolshevik Party who were detained in March of 2001. In the process of investigation, evidence reportedly was obtained indicating Limonov's involvement in the crimes. (FEDERAL SECURITY SERVICE WEBSITE, 14 Apr 01; www.fsb.ru)

While at a house near the Altai village of Bannoye, where he was writing a book, Limonov was arrested on the night of 7-8 April by dozens of special service agents in camouflage and transferred to Moscow's infamous Lefortovo Prison. The court hearing is scheduled for 18 April and Limonov could face up to eight years of imprisonment for violating Criminal Code Article 222 (illegal possession, transfer, distribution, storing, transport or carrying of firearms, ammunition, explosives).

Limonov's lawyer, Sergei Belyak, said that the arrest could very well be an intimidation tactic, "a signal from the regime to all left-radical parties in order to tell them who is boss." (www.exile.ru, and INTERFAX, 13 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis)

POLITICAL PARTIES
My party bloc is bigger than your party bloc
Even prior to the recent merger between Unity and Fatherland-All Russia, in an exchange worthy of a playground squabble, the Unity faction (now led by St. Petersburg-native Vladimir Pekhtin) had caught up in size to the Communists -- 85 members each, counting former independent Aleksandr Ryazanov and former member of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Aleksei Guzanov, who have joined Unity. "This is an important event which highlights President Vladimir Putin's influence in the Duma," said Pekhtin, who added that Ryazanov and Guzanov "will not be the last" to switch allegiances. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 11 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis) And as the Communists have faithful Agrarians to buttress their position, Unity also gained a partner in Fatherland-All Russia. The presidential press secretary relayed President Putin's enthusiasm for the merger between Unity and Fatherland: "This is a serious step towards
establishing a Russian political system," he quoted. "This decision will promote the consolidation of society and the unification between the conservative forces of the state." (ITAR-TASS, 0847 GMT, 12 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0412, via World News Connection) Communists and Agrarians add up to 127 members. Unity and Fatherland-All Russia beat them with 132. And there is talk of further mergers as well.

Transcending borders
In the meanwhile, Boris Nemtsov's Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) is branching out to London. "Until this time Russian citizens who live abroad could not fully participate in the political life of Russia," said Nemtsov. "Our party wants to get rid of this injustice." Or perhaps, in a truly capitalistic spirit, Nemtsov is hoping to gain a marketing advantage among the two-million-strong Russian expatriate community. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 10 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Sarah Miller

Putin's State of the Nation address: mum's the word
As all eyes focused on the US-China standoff, President Putin delivered his annual State of the Nation address on 3 April, which included -- or more accurately did not include -- the first official foreign policy statement since his 26 January address to the foreign ministry. The address, which was short on foreign policy substance, indicates that Moscow may back off from -- but not interrupt -- bilateral relations with Washington until July while it continues to seek more ties to Europe, regardless of recent stumbles.

Reading between the lines
Putin's 63-minute address, much like his January speech, stressed the importance of economic development, but was short on how this might affect
Russian foreign policy. While he described a "course of integration with Europe" as "one of the main directions" of foreign policy, he did not explain what the other directions might be. (INTERFAX, 3 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0403, via World News Connection)

Significantly, Putin omitted any reference to US-Russian relations, suggesting that Russia is now trying to downplay the relationship just as the Bush administration has done since taking office. Putin's omission of the US in the address may signal a less eager approach to bilateral relations, but certainly not disengagement. As Sergei Karaganov, president of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, cautioned recently, "The USA is the most powerful country and hence it would be a senseless expenditure of strength to try to fight it. Any bad relations with the USA would only slow down rapprochement with many countries including in Europe." (SEGODNYA, 6 Apr 01; via Johnson's Russia List)

Waiting for Genoa
Russia may continue to improve ties with Europe and elsewhere, but there are few indications that relations with the US are not a Russian priority. Only a week after Putin's address, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov met with US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Paris. Moscow has pressed Washington for bilateral meetings such as this one, which have covered a variety of topics but have done little to change outwardly the current state of relations. Commenting on the Paris meeting, Ivanov expressed impatience with the state of US-Russian relations, saying, "it is important that we actually start a dialogue on problems with the new US administration. We have for a long time said that we are ready for such a dialogue." (REUTERS, 12 Apr 01; via RussiaToday.com)

While Washington's willingness to hold the Powell-Ivanov meetings -- in Cairo and Paris -- suggests that it is committed to keeping open the lines of communication, several details indicate that Washington is not yet interested in expanding the dialogue with Moscow beyond these limited forums. Both Powell-
Ivanov meetings were held on the sidelines of Powell's visits to the Middle East and Europe, respectively, and as Powell's schedule permitted. In addition, while the meetings included a variety of issues, including arms and regional hotspots, they did nothing to improve visibly the already cool relations between the two countries or result in any plans for further bilateral meetings. The signal from Washington is that no major meetings will occur until after the July G-7 meeting in Genoa, at which Bush and Putin are to meet on the sidelines.

**Setbacks in Europe**

In the meantime, two recent setbacks -- both involving Germany, Russia's closest European partner -- indicate that building ties to Europe may be a more difficult project than anticipated. Putin's St. Petersburg meeting on 10 April with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder was a timely example of the kind of engagement to which his address referred. Putin and Schroeder have expressed their desire to move their relations "beyond clichés," focusing on economic cooperation, debt relief and regional security. (ITAR-TASS, 2083 GMT, 28 Mar 01; FBIS-WEU-2001-0328, via World News Connection) However, even their personal ties could not overcome the obstacles that still remain in the political relationship. In a surprising turn of events, the leaders could not come to terms regarding the much anticipated debt relief agreement. The debt relief was to pave the way for more extensive Russian-German economic relations. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 31 Jan 01)

This impasse came only two weeks after German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, while speaking to the UN Human Rights Commission, urged Russia to "open a serious political dialogue in order to seek a peaceful solution to the Chechen conflict in which human rights are still being violated by both parties." (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 27 Mar 01; FBIS-WEU-2001-0327, via World News Connection) The EU collectively echoed German criticism of the war in Chechnya in a resolution presented to the UN Human Rights forum concurrent with Schroeder's trip in mid-April. The resolution strongly condemns Russia's
"inappropriate and indiscriminate" use of force against civilians in Chechnya. (REUTERS, 13 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis) Russia has ignored previous resolutions and criticisms from Europe and elsewhere concerning Chechnya, claiming that the war is an internal matter. Although it is unclear if the recent moves by Europe to express concern and urge restraint will again go unheeded, Europe is sending a message that it values human rights, and that Russia clearly does not.

Although Putin's address may have centered on Europe, challenges there and elsewhere clearly will continue to draw Russian attention. Despite the back burner approach in the address towards the US in particular, relations with Washington, especially as they apply to Russian arms and involvement with other states around the globe, undoubtedly will remain a high priority in Russian foreign policy, whether Putin mentions the US explicitly or not.

Russian Federation: Media

By Maria Metcalf

All hope extinguished

In the past month, journalistic coverage of the Russian Federation media has gone from being suspiciously lacking in content to finding a place in the news market. Media-MOST's lost battle for independence has finally climaxed and while current Western and Russian media coverage seems to indicate that NTV is dying with a bang, in actuality it has already passed with only a pathetic whimper. The final stage of NTV's struggle has begun to attract the attention of the international community. It seems, however, that no amount of attention will change the final outcome of NTV's loss of independence.

On 4 April, Gazprom-Media teamed up with Capital Research Management -- a US mutual fund that owns only 4.5 percent of NTV -- to remove Gusinsky and his associates from NTV's board of directors and replace them with new
management that would be more subservient to the Kremlin. Together, Gazprom-Media and Capital Research Management hold 50.44 percent of NTV shares, just enough to make decisions and to change the board of directors. Alfred Kokh, head of Gazprom media company, replaced Vladimir Gusinsky as the NTV chief, and American-born investment banker Boris Jordon replaced managing director Yevgeny Kiselev. The coup came as a surprise because a Saratov court originally had ruled against the shareholders meeting, declaring that it could not take place until the complex voting rights issue was resolved. However, when the former NTV personality Yevgeny Kiselev arrived at Gazprom offices on Tuesday to present the ruling that banned the meeting, he was confronted with a piece of paper, signed by the same judge, which reversed the first decision, and the Gazprom shareholders meeting occurred as planned. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 4 Apr 01) Apparently, the judge who reversed the ruling was not available for comment. The days following the NTV takeover have been marked by protests, political dissent, resignations, finger pointing, negotiations and general confusion. It may be difficult enough even for those inside the Kremlin to follow all of the twists and turns of this scandal; the average Russian likely lost interest long ago.

The NTV journalists immediately suspended normal programming in protest and began running continuous news reports for two days until Kiselev requested that NTV resume usual broadcasting for the sake of the viewers. Kiselev's protest included not accepting the decisions of the newly appointed board of directors, and continuing to work exactly as it had before the Gazprom takeover. Many NTV employees followed Kiselev's directive, blocking the entrances and refusing to acknowledge any leadership, editorial or other changes dictated by Gazprom-Media. But many NTV employees chose to cooperate with the new management, and others chose to resign, indicating disunity among the NTV staff. Several employees have resigned, including news anchors Tatyana Mitkova and Natalya Zabuzova, political reporter Alexei Pivovarov, and Mikhail Frolov, host of the "Kriminal" program. According to Frolov, they didn't want to leave, but they
"couldn't find a common language with the people now setting policy."
(MOSCOW TIMES, 10 Apr 01)

Another employee resigned for other reasons. Top anchorman Leonid Parfenov reportedly did not support Kiselev's tactics in handling the takeover. Parfenov regarded NTV staff's refusal to cooperate with Gazprom as imprudent, and accused Kiselev of using the staff as "cannon fodder." Not surprisingly, Gazprom has offered Parfenov a job with NTV's new board of directors. Parfenov is now regarded as a traitor by the NTV staff who continued to protest. Some former NTV journalists have remarked that NTV's protest is taking priority over news, and that it is unprofessional. Former NTV director, Oleg Dobrodeev accused Kiselev of being selfishly unobjective and of creating hysteria among NTV employees, for personal financial reasons. Coincidentally, Dobrodeev left NTV last year to work for the state radio and television company VGTRK.

There were protests supporting NTV both in Moscow and in St. Petersburg over the weekend after the coup. Police estimated that over 10,000 persons gathered peacefully in Moscow, and over 5,000 in St. Petersburg (the police estimates were substantially lower than those of the rally organizers). While the protests did not produce political reason or government will to act on behalf of preserving one of the fundamental freedoms requisite in any democracy, it did demonstrate the budding of another necessity of any open society: The protests indicate the existence of a sliver of civil society. Unfortunately, that small bit was not enough.

On 7 April, Jordan went to work at NTV with armed guards to ensure his ability to get beyond the NTV gates and his safety once he began making the necessary changes to "address NTV's financial problems." Meanwhile Kokh told state television that he would try not to use force or to fire NTV journalists, as long as he perceived that the staff was responding to Gazprom's "gestures of good will."
(Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 9 Apr 01)
**Turner the Savior?**

Despite earlier promises, very little evidence exists to indicate that Ted Turner can preserve NTV's editorial independence. Turner's potential success would depend entirely on Putin and his friends. Turner can only ensure the television station's independence if he is able to persuade Gazprom to sell him shares. Such a move is unlikely. As Gazprom moved to take control, Turner made a deal to buy 11 percent of NTV from Gusinsky and sought to purchase 19 percent from Gazprom. Gusinsky would still own 20 percent but would give Turner voting power (if it were permitted). Gusinsky has agreed to sell the 11-percent share to Turner for what Gusinsky calls a "financially disadvantageous" price. However, Jordan has expressed "confusion about the news of Turner's deal to purchase Gusinsky's shares." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 6 Apr 01) Also, on 9 April, a parliamentary deputy introduced a bill that would forbid a foreign investor from owning more than 25 percent of a Russian television station. Furthermore, Kokh stated that he "disapproved of the way Turner is running the show," saying the American doesn't understand "the reality of Russian politics." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 9 Apr 01) These gestures are all too familiar in the Kremlin. The government isn't willing to say formally that it will not allow Turner to be a media player in Russia. To one who has monitored the Kremlin's rhetoric in relation to its actions, however, these gestures indicate that the state has no intention of letting Turner interfere with its plans for the eventual elimination of media freedom, and that it is preserving the right to manipulate the situation to the Russian public when the time comes. The Russian media have claimed already that Ted Turner plans to curb NTV's editorial independence if he acquires a significant stake in the company.

Additionally, Turner announced he would follow 10 "principles" in relation to NTV. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 9 Apr 01) The "principles" were cryptic and contradictory and included
Number 1: "The channel's editorial policy will be independent of its owners, the
government and any political or power groups."
Number 7: "NTV will not place itself in opposition to the government of Russia or
any party, political group or person."
Number 9: "NTV journalists will raise questions, even the most difficult and
contradictory, but will refrain from giving answers or interpretations, leaving that
up to the viewers." (NTV, 7 Apr 01; Izvestia, 9 Apr 01; via Jamestown Foundation
MONITOR)

Is it possible that Turner would follow these irreconcilable principles, when Putin
wouldn’t agree to ensure NTV’s independence when Turner requested this a few
months ago? It causes one to wonder if Putin is enjoying watching Mr. Turner
dance about as the president pulls the strings. It seems that a business magnate
like Turner might “smell a rat” in a business deal. Or could it be that Kokh is
correct, that Turner doesn’t understand "the reality of Russian politics?"

Putin’s strategy
President Putin, Press Minister Lesin and Kokh all still maintain that the battle
between Gazprom and Media-MOST was strictly business. Despite Gazprom-
Media’s own financial problems and reports of incompetence, it is evident that the
new management will impose a new editorial policy using as an excuse the claim
that it is cleaning up NTV’s financial problems. Putin has declared also that he
will not take sides... yet his silence regarding the takeover, and his inactivity in
general regarding Media-MOST’s struggle from start to finish indicate that not
only has he taken sides, but he and his allies have cheered Gazprom on from the
beginning. Despite the urgings of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev,
who is the head of NTV’s advisory council, "to put an end to the lawlessness,"
Putin seems relatively uninterested. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 16 Apr 01) Putin
did announce, however, that he believed that the courts should settle the dispute.
The Duma has also refused to focus any attention on the problem.
According to Novye izvestiya, Putin's political advisors have two different theories of how Putin should handle the current media situation. At this point, Putin cannot lose. If he remains silent and continues to maintain that the struggle between Gazprom and Media-MOST is financial, the new NTV board of directors will eliminate all opposition within the station; the old NTV's editorial policy will be replaced by a more "Kremlin-friendly" editorial style; the rebellion will die away; people will forget and few will pay attention to a long and boring (putative) court case. (NOVYE IZVESTIA, 6 Apr 01; via WPS Monitoring Agency, www.wps.ru) A recent poll indicates that a majority of Russians do not sympathize with NTV journalists anyway. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 6 Apr 01) As a Moscow Times reader stated in a letter to the editor, "the fight over NTV has very little to do with a business dispute; it has everything to do with how business is conducted in Russia...the NTV protest has brought the horror of Russia's 'business as usual' into homes throughout this vast country." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 11 Apr 01) The Russian people on the whole don't want to be bombarded anymore with the hopeless fact "that there is no political will existing to address the myriad problems that Russian citizens face everyday." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 11 Apr 01)

If, on the other hand, President Putin decides to act in a way that will continue to give the illusion that he is a reformer, thus ensuring his membership in the club of world leaders, he could tell Kokh and Jordan that they will have to face the Moscow Supreme Court. Kokh and Jordan may or may not be sacrificed, but by the time the putative court case is over, few will notice that NTV --which had come to be regarded as the symbol of free press in Russia -- will have been replaced long since by a clone whose editorial style was less critical of the Kremlin, headed by another set of managers who were humbly aware that they owed Putin a favor or two. By then, those who are still protesting the Gazprom takeover will have become either too poor, or too exhausted, to pursue a losing battle. Any opponents still standing most likely will resign just as the many who have already left.
Bravo Mr. Putin. You now have the West's attention, and it seems as if you will effectively pull off the elimination of Russia's free press, while at the same time convincing Western leaders such as Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder that you are wise, concerned about press and other freedoms, adhere to the democratic ideals of the rule of law, and are the sort of progressive, cooperative leader with whom the others should want to work.

**Russian Federation: Armed Forces**

By Richard Miller

Now three weeks into his tenure as Russia's new Minister of Defense (MoD), Sergei Ivanov has pledged to bolster the prestige of the armed forces, while at the same time undertaking the reform plans he outlined in his previous post as Security Council secretary. He has also undertaken not to make sweeping personnel changes in the next few weeks. However, whenever these personnel changes do occur, they will constitute an important indicator for the future development of the Russian military and the chances that reform can succeed.

Immediately after Ivanov's appointment to the MoD, President Putin met with him and Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin. The public announcement indicated this meeting was to discuss the military reform priorities and timetable. (RIA, 0908 GMT, 29 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0329, via World News Connection) Given the competitive and sometimes acrimonious relationship between Ivanov's predecessor, Sergeev, and Kvashnin, it is safe to assume that this meeting also established fundamental ground rules for the relations between the new minister's staff and that of General Kvashnin.

Kvashnin's future, and that of many other senior military officials, has been the subject of much Russian press speculation. With Ivanov's security service
background and upcoming reform agenda, it appears that he is unlikely to tolerate a new General Staff chief who is overly ambitious or possesses a strong independent streak. Likewise, personnel qualifications for other key positions may be centered more on personal loyalties than on professional competence.

To build an appropriate consensus for reform efforts requires more than the removal of defense ministry members who may oppose them; it demands also support from a diverse group of other military leaders and politicians to ensure reforms are implemented in more than name only. The impending MoD senior leadership changes certainly will have major influence on the shape of events in the next few months. No less important for the long-term future of the Russian military are the reactions of the mid-level, career military officers to the "takeover" by a career security service officer of the most senior post (historically held by one of their own). Furthermore, today's mid-level officers are the energetic future leaders whom the current leadership requires to accept the reform plans if they are to be implemented successfully in the future. Ensuring the welfare and support of these officers should be the MoD's first priority if there is to be a successful reform effort.

Welfare of the soldiers may have the best advocate in one of the recent MoD personnel changes being touted widely by many government officials -- the appointment of a woman, Lyubov Kudelina (a former deputy in the finance ministry with oversight responsibility for military spending) to be deputy defense minister responsible for finance. Her general familiarity with military spending issues and "outsider" perspective with presumably no personal or organizational loyalties within the MoD make her a logical choice for the position. The biggest test for success in this arena is posed by the scope of corruption throughout the finance structure of the military. In a recent radio interview, she was chagrined to learn that so many military units still were not receiving their subsistence allowances, given the budget changes that were implemented last year. As she stated, "but in today's situation, with the budget being implemented as it is, this
comes at a complete surprise to me. Why indeed, with regular and unimpeded flows of federal budget funds, are such delays taking place? What is the reason for these delays? I mean, at what stage in the passage of funds does the problem start and why don't the servicemen get their money? This problem has to be addressed." (MAYAK RADIO, 0700 GMT, 31 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0331, via World News Connection) For the sake of the reform effort and the attempt to create a professional force, Putin and Ivanov had better hope she can figure it out.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

All hail Kuchma!

There can be no denying at this point that President Leonid Kuchma has beaten back and beaten down his opponents. Although a sizable opposition continues to exist and demand his resignation, it has proven ineffectual. Although Prime Minster Viktor Yushchenko's popularity and success surpassed Kuchma this last year, he and his cabinet are under siege by a coalition of communists and business leaders who just happen to be supporters of the president. Although a number of independent journalists and media outlets attract a large audience by producing balanced reports (which are often critical of Kuchma), most have proven unable to fight interminable tax audits, fines, legal challenges and violence. Yes, it has been a good few months for the president. In January, the opposition movement was growing, Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko's power was increasing, and Kuchma was enduring a barrage of criticism from the media coupled with numerous calls for him to resign. Today, the opposition has been made impotent, Yushchenko has been largely neutralized and much of the media has been silenced. There is, needless to say, no more talk of Kuchma's resignation.
On 31 March, Batkivshchina Party member Oleksandr Turchinov boldly announced that the temporary rearrest of Yulia Tymoshenko would result in "new mass rallies" by Kuchma's opponents. The opposition umbrella group Forum for National Salvation soon after called two demonstrations for the week of 9 April; both suffered from disappointing attendance. The first, on 9 April, attracted just 2,000 students. The second, on 11 April, brought out only 4,000 protesters, instead of the 10,000 hoped for by the forum. At the same time, Kuchma used his political machinery to bring together between 7,000 and 10,000 persons for a rally to support him during a visit to Odessa. The effect probably was demoralizing for the opposition, which must realize, as Deutsche Presse-Agentur noted, that it is "running out of steam." (DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR, 1516 CET, 12 April 01; via lexis-nexis)

At the same time, Viktor Yushchenko is now facing a vote of no-confidence in the same parliament where he was repeatedly praised last year for his successful economic program. Since opposition members began suggesting that Kuchma should resign in favor of Yushchenko, the prime minister has been attacked from all sides. A tacit coalition between the Communist Party and several other parties run by "oligarchs" which have benefited from close ties to the president has been very effective. This marriage of convenience has left Yushchenko with the choice either to remove some of his most reform-oriented ministers or face removal himself. As the no-confidence vote neared, his spokesperson, Natalia Zarudna, told reporters, "He will be the last to lose hope in the signing of an agreement between the government and the parliamentary majority." (UKRAINIAN NEWS, 12 Apr 01; via KPNews) For his part, Yushchenko attempted to appeal to lawmakers' sensibility. "By supporting the government, you would be supporting economic growth in Ukraine," he said during his report on the past year's governmental activity. "It is very important to ensure that political retributions do not result in the loss of what we already have." (UKRAINIAN NEWS, 17 Apr 01; via KPNews)
Unfortunately, it is very likely that retribution, not sensibility, will rule when the time comes to cast votes for or against Yushchenko. He has angered the parties of the oligarchs by attempting to limit their power; he has angered some centrist politicians by signing a letter in support of Kuchma; and he has angered Kuchma by surpassing him in popularity. Still, the Forum for National Salvation is doing everything it can to prop up the prime minister. It even appears that Kuchma, possibly comprehending the international outrage Yushchenko's ouster would cause or perhaps realizing the importance of having Yushchenko indebted to him, is quietly coming to the PM's aid.

Curiously, the one major factor that might make the most difference -- the international community -- is not. Although Western countries and organizations understandably are appalled by the allegations against Kuchma, support for Yushchenko, his past achievements and his future Western-oriented program could sway legislators as they consider their votes. With the exception of US Ambassador Carlos Pascual, that support from the West has been limited, to say the least.

Many Ukrainians will have heard little about the trials of Viktor Yushchenko, however. The last month has seen an upswing of anti-media activity by the government. Just last week, Ukraine’s National Broadcasting Council refused to renew the license of the radio station that had worked with Georgy Gongadze and that also carried news reports from the BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle. Radio Kontinent director Serhy Sholokh suggested that because "Radio Kontinent is taking an objective stance in providing information and is cooperating with foreign broadcasters, with the Ukrainian authorities having no influence over their editorial policies," the station was not allowed to continue operating. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 16 Apr 01; via KPNews) Kontinent's loss of a radio license is just the latest in a long line of licenses removed from independent, Western-oriented stations by government officials. The authorities
have not shied from attempting to intimidate foreign outlets, either. Representatives of Radio Liberty have complained many times during the last several months of attempts by the authorities to make the service "obedient and resigned to their will," and the BBC has complained of government pressure on the stations that carry its broadcasts. (INTELNEWS, 0755 GMT, 18 Dec 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis)

More importantly, Kontinent's loss comes at the same time that Kuchma has very quietly created an "information policy council" to act as an "advisory" body to the president. Advisory body for what is not entirely clear. But the membership of the council suggests that the group very well could be little more than a glorified censorship board. It includes "representatives of leading media agencies," the presidential chief of staff (who is reportedly heard on the Gongadze tapes discussing how to "deal with" the Gongadze), the national security and defense council deputy secretary, the heads of two national television and radio organizations and several other heads of newspapers or radio stations friendly to Kuchma. (INTELNEWS, 0600 GMT, 5 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0405, via World News Connection) The list also includes the President of National Television of Ukraine (UT-1), Vadym Dolhanov, whom Yushchenko has asked to have dismissed for stifling "pluralism" at the network. It appears that Yushchenko's concerns will go unaddressed.

In fact, most of Yushchenko's concerns likely will remain unresolved in the new political environment ruled by a triad of the president, the oligarchs and the communists. Kuchma has won this battle. Whether he has won the war is yet to be determined.

MOLDOVA
The beginning of a beautiful friendship . . .
Could a solution to the Dniestr conflict be within sight? Well . . . that probably depends on your definition of "solution." It now appears that the new Moldovan
government is within inches of doing the one thing all previous governments had steadfastly refused to consider -- accepting the situation as it exists today in Moldova, with a partitioned state, two administrations and an abundance of Russian weaponry and troops. Indeed, in just a few short months, the status quo in Moldova could be affirmed legally by both sides. Of course, major practical matters remain to be solved, but "progress" is already well underway.

On 9 April, newly inaugurated Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin and the self-styled head of the Dniestr administration, Igor Smirnov, met in Chisinau. It was the first meeting in several months between both sides of the conflict, but the encounter was not only important for its timing. The Voronin-Smirnov meeting bypassed normal channels and did not include any of the recognized mediators in the contest, be it Russia, Ukraine or the OSCE. It appears that Voronin and Smirnov intend to find their own way to their own special solution. Judging from their comments after the tête-à-tête, that solution apparently would encompass the "common state" approach, championed by former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, that previously had been rejected by Moldovan negotiators. In addition, according to Smirnov, the possible solution would address several Dniestr demands also previously rejected by the Moldovan side. Those include, not surprisingly, the possible introduction of Russian as a second state language and consideration of the "adherence of Moldova to the Russian-Belarus union."(BESAPRESS, 1600 GMT, 11 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0411, via World News Connection). Both of these issues are dear to Smirnov's heart and were at the top of Voronin's campaign promise list (although he has backed down slightly on both promises since being elected).

Not mentioned following the meeting were Russian troops stationed in Dniestr. They will be the subject of later meetings, according to Voronin's representatives. Unfortunately, that is doubtful. If the new president wishes to "solve" the Dniestr issue quickly and forge closer ties with Russia -- as are his stated goals -- he
simply cannot afford to make Russian troops an issue. So, it seems that the troops are likely here to stay.

Clearly, just as Voronin promised, he is approaching the Dniestr problem with a new philosophy and attempting to end the conflict quickly. Unfortunately for the Moldovan state, this philosophy is almost sure to result in a permanently divided, and permanently occupied, state.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskoy

Dagestan and Stavropol: Consolidating the 'power vertical'

Last summer, as their powers vis-à-vis Moscow were being curtailed, the governors won the right to fire mayors. However, Moscow still requires that local leaders be elected, and not merely appointed by the governors. (IEWS RUSSIAN REGIONAL REPORT, 2 Apr 01) The governors have not always complied with this rule and continue to tighten the screws on their most serious competitors, the local governments.

In Dagestan the governing structures at the republican level determine whether a local mayor is appointed from above or elected locally. Over the years, there has been a mixture of arrangements -- some are appointed, others are elected. In one case, in 1998 a popularly elected mayor in Kizilyurt was forced to stand down when a mafia-connected competitor struck a deal with Movladi Magomedov, the head of Dagestan's State Council. (Anna Matveeva, THE NORTH CAUCASUS, RUSSIA'S FRAGILE BORDERLAND, RIIS, 1999, p. 23) Currently there is fierce competition in at least two regions of Dagestan, Novolak and Kaspisk, due to ethnic tension and criminal activity, respectively. Coming under pressure from the federal authorities to hold local elections and define the division of powers between regional and local governments, Magomedov raised
the specter of external provocation: "Somebody needs to build confrontation. To those who are seeking this, I want to say there will be no elections there .... "
(IEWS RUSSIAN REGIONAL REPORT, 2 Apr 01)

Dagestan's legislation has not been brought into line with federal standards in other respects. The law on religion passed in December 1997 is far more draconian than federal legislation. Dagestan's September 1999 ban on Wahhabism and other forms of "extremism" does not exist at the federal level and contradicts basic religious freedoms guaranteed under federal law.

In a separate incident on 9 April, the Stavropol city government eliminated three districts and fired 200 municipal employees to rid itself of political opposition in the ranks of the city's deputies. The mayor apparently had the blessing of the Southern Federal District authorities, who commented that the Stavropol city council was much too large. (GLASNOST - CAUCASUS, 11 Apr 01)

CHECHNYA

Will the real 'collaborator' please stand up?

Until recently inter-Chechen clashes were frequently prophesied but rarely materialized. For instance, many expected field commanders to fight each other in the aftermath of the assassination of President Dzhokhar Dudaev in 1996. Instead, the commanders held elections and (in most respects) honored them. When accused of having failed to rein in the criminal elements in 1997 - 1999, President Aslan Maskhadov attributed his inaction to apprehensions about setting off a spiral of violence between different factions.

Recently such inter-Chechen fighting has erupted: Members of the Chechen resistance were reported to be organizing assassinations of fellow Chechens who were employed in the Russian-sponsored Kadyrov government. As Human Rights Watch noted in a 2 April 2001 open letter to Maskhadov:
Human Rights Watch is deeply troubled by a pattern of attacks and threats -- apparently by Chechen forces -- on people working for the civilian administration that was established by the Russian government in 2000. Throughout the past ten months, more than a dozen such individuals or their family members have died as a result of these attacks; many more were wounded. (...) Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations have received copies of lists naming Chechens cooperating with the federal government who have been sentenced to death by a Sharia court solely for this cooperation.

Thus, seven Chechens were found guilty of collaboration with the federal military (i.e., fingering the families of resistance fighters to the federal authorities) and were executed in the Urus-Martan district by groups under the command of Arbi Baraev. On 8 April in a village in the Grozny region nine persons were killed by unknown individuals who drove an unmarked car. Local sources attributed the killings to Baraev, because among the slain was an informant who had fingered an associate of Baraev and a local administrator who had been an outspoken critic of Baraev and had persuaded young men to abandon his detachment. (GLASNOST-CAUCASUS, 10 Apr 01)

Baraev is regarded as one of the most notorious extremist commanders responsible for high-profile kidnappings of Russian officials and journalists. Yet, he also seems to be working with the FSB. In November 1999, Bareav was arrested in Grozny by the military and then suddenly released when Grozny Mayor Beslan Gantemirov arrived on the scene with his supporters. Later, some Russian officials denied that Baraev was ever captured, while General Kvashnin insisted that Baraev in fact had been detained briefly. (CHECHNYA WEEKLY, 9 Jan 01) Baraev is also reported to carry identification papers from the FSB which allow him to pass checkpoints.

GEORGIA

It's been a long, dark winter
Georgia and its government have survived a very tough winter. Russia imposed a visa regime, cut energy supplies (prompting demonstrations in the capital), and threatened to carry out operations against Chechens in Georgia's Pankisi region. Remarkably, Eduard Shevardnadze is still the president and he has not made any major concessions to Russia.

Of course the pressure has not gone away. The full visa regime came into force on 1 March 2001, but Russian and Georgian representatives negotiated a number of exceptions. Simplified procedures were developed for Russian military members serving in Georgia and for Georgian citizens residing in Russia. A third visa-free crossing was added in a Georgian-populated border region; two such crossings had been operational for months in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. (Jamestown Foundation PRISM, Mar 01) President Shevardnadze needled Russian authorities by pointing out that no special arrangements were envisaged for the roughly 300,000 ethnic Russian residents of Georgia and promising to form a commission to look into their needs. (INTERFAX, 2 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis)

In the meantime, another shipment of military equipment has left Vaziani and the Russian command promises to dismantle that base and the Gadauta facility in time for the 1 July 2001 deadline. Georgian representatives continue to resist Russian pressure to extend the lease on Batumi and Akhalkalaki for 15 years. No "cleansing" operations by Russian services have been held in Pankisi Gorge. Additional Georgian troops will not be introduced there; instead Shevardnadze says some of the roughly 7,000 Chechen refugees are willing to return to Chechnya if their security can be insured. (RIA OREANDA, 2 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis)

In part this resilience is attributable to attention from the new American administration. The most difficult time for Georgia overlapped with the turmoil around the American elections. Once President George W. Bush took office,
Russian pressure seemed to subside. While the Bush administration made no firm commitments to Georgia, it continually showed attention to Georgia's predicament. Over the last few weeks, President Bush wrote to Shevardnadze pledging to work together to solve problems. (INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, 12 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis) Similarly, Georgia hosted two very important guests: FBI Director Louis Freeh on 20-21 March (ITAR-TASS, 26 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis) and the commander-in-chief of the US European Command, General Joseph Ralston, on 5 April. (INTERFAX, 5 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Lt. Col. James DeTemple

Central Asian rapid reaction force support gathered
CIS Collective Security Council Secretary Valery Nikolaenko visited Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan 28-31 March to bolster support for a rapid reaction force in Central Asia. Russia's military presence is a key component of its security strategy in Central Asia, and establishing regional forces in Central Asia within the framework of the CIS Collective Security Treaty is high on Moscow's security agenda.

Based on an agreement signed in Bishkek in October 2000, a joint rapid reaction force consisting of four battalions from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan would be used to respond to regional crises across Central Asia and to fortify porous border areas against terrorist attacks and incursions. The joint rapid reaction force would be a "small, compact group, consisting of four battalions contributed by the partner states," according to the CIS security chief. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 5 Apr 01; via lexis-nexis)

Nikolaenko also discussed political and military integration of the rapid reaction force with Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akaev in Bishkek. (RIA, 0624 GMT, 2 Apr
Bishkek has been discussed as one of the possible locations for the rapid reaction force headquarters. Kyrgyzstan Defense Minister Esen Topoev, who also met with Nikolaenko, stated that establishing the headquarters would be "the first step in setting up collective rapid deployment forces" under the Collective Security Treaty. The command and control relationships for the nascent rapid reaction force will be outlined during upcoming "Southern Shield" exercises in Moscow. As with other CIS ventures, Russia undoubtedly will hold the key leadership positions and dominate the command structure.

Russia also will provide significant military technical assistance and equipment to Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan's forces currently are deployed along mountain passes and other potential invasion routes based on their experience in the past two military campaigns against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and in anticipation of renewed fighting in the region. (The IMU staged several incursions in August 2000 into a remote mountainous region bordering southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from bases in Tajikistan.) The deployed Kyrgyz mountain units will be subsumed by the joint command, Topoev said: "The main role is attributed to the anti-terrorist rapid reaction forces" of the Collective Security Treaty. 

On 31 March, Nikolaenko met with Tajikistan's defense minister, Sherali Khayrulloev, Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov and Security Council Secretary Amirqul Azimov in Dushanbe to discuss regional security issues and CIS efforts to expand military cooperation with Tajikistan. The CIS security chief expressed concern about a possible repeat of last year's IMU border incursions and reiterated that the "Tajik-Afghan border is the main defense line for the territorial integrity and security of the entire Central Asian region."
Russia continues to wield considerable military influence in Central Asia although the tenor of that influence is changing from bilateral agreements to multilateral endeavors. Russian efforts to create a rapid reaction force in Central Asia constitutes the first concrete step Moscow has taken to establish regional forces within the framework of the CIS Collective Security Treaty. A Russian-led rapid reaction force in Central Asia will enable Russia to create a buffer zone against "international terrorism" and drug trafficking as well as preserve its military presence on the CIS's southern borders. Indeed, by placing their national rapid-deployment battalions under Russian command, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are surrendering a certain degree of autonomy in defense matters, making them more closely resemble Russian protectorates than sovereign states.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States

By Kate Martin

Back to the old schoolbooks
Discussion about the effects of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states was left off the agenda of the recent meeting between Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, at the insistence of Russian planners. However, the topic remains on the agenda of others.
The interparliamentary Baltic Assembly announced that it has not dropped its plan to demand an admission from Russia of Soviet occupation, and will discuss a resolution to that effect at its May meeting in Riga. According to Trivimi Velliste, who heads the Estonian delegation, the motivation behind such a resolution is Russia's refusal to apologize to the Baltic States, despite having apologized to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. (BNS, 1337 GMT, 28 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0328, via World News Connection)

Prior to the Adamkus-Putin meeting, Moscow rejected Lithuania's demand for compensation for the damages inflicted during the occupation. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Sergeev said such claims "ignore political, historical and legal realities and therefore are unfounded." According to his version of history, "Soviet troops entered Lithuania in 1940 with the consent of the Lithuanian administration obtained under the norms of the international law in effect at the time.... [T]he decision by the Supreme Council of the USSR of 3 August 1940, to admit Lithuania into the Soviet Union was preceded by the corresponding request from the highest representative body of the (Lithuanian) state." (INTERFAX, 0843 GMT, 28 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0328, via World News Connection)

Such revisionism garnered a not-unexpected response from Lithuania's former speaker of the parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, who had initiated the law obligating the government to seek the compensation, estimated at $20 billion. In a press release on 30 March, Landsbergis warned that "political extremists, re-writers of history and inspectors of international legal acts have resumed their efforts." Sergeev "is unaware of the main document regulating Lithuanian-Russian relations, namely the agreement of 29 July 1991 which denounced the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union," he added. (BNS, 0907 GMT, 30 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0330, via World News Connection)
Notwithstanding Landsbergis' hopeful assertion that Sergeev's comments stem from a lack of awareness of the status of Lithuanian-Russian relations, the deputy minister's statements indicate that nostalgia for the "good old days of the Soviet Union" is alive and well in the halls of the Kremlin. That's not news to analysts who have read of President Putin's earlier salutes to chekisti of yore. What is news is that the curtain separating official comments for domestic and international consumption seems to be tearing at a time when Putin has been trying to present a calm and rational Russian face to the world. Why are Putin and Sergeev playing an international version of good cop/bad cop? Are they still testing the waters of world public opinion, or is there simply a lack of good history books in Moscow's stores?

For whom the bell tolls
Reaction to the death knell rung recently for Russian press freedom was not limited to the streets of Moscow. Baltic journalists also protested the hostile takeover of Media-MOST's NTV.

The Estonian press associations sent a letter to Russian President Putin expressing their alarm over the situation at NTV. "Takeover of the TV station by a company with a state stake creates concerns; it raises the issue of NTV's ability to operate as an independent press channel," the letter read. (ETA NEWS AGENCY, 1609 GMT, 5 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0405, via World News Connection) The Latvian Journalists' Union also expressed its solidarity with the NTV journalists and called on the International Journalists' Federation to support the NTV campaign and add an international presence to the protest. (BNS, 1132 GMT, 6 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0406, via World News Connection) One cannot help but feel that the call for international scrutiny might have longer-lasting effects, if heeded, than the Estonian response. It is difficult to believe that Putin didn't know such a move by the state would affect NTV's independence, since that was clearly the government's intent; not acknowledging that fact takes all the teeth out of the media bite.
Alas, Latvian media need to look in their own backyard as well. While the state is not restraining Baltic media, some bruises are showing nonetheless. The new Daugavpils town council decided that neither censorship laws nor hostile takeovers were necessary to stop unfavorable coverage by the local television station. The council simply reneged on its agreement to provide equipment to the station. Daugavpils Television (DTV) Director Vasilijs Semjonovs told the Baltic News Service that town council officials and municipal police officers arrived at the television station on 3 April and confiscated equipment the council previously had agreed to lend to the station. Council official Marina Gorkina said the equipment was taken away because the agreement with DTV had expired, and the council would need the equipment to establish its own (presumably friendlier) production group. (BNS, 1257 GMT, 4 Apr 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0404, via World News Connection)

Daugavpils television is not the only media outlet in the predominantly Russian-speaking town in eastern Latvia that has experienced attempts at control by the authorities. According to earlier reports from Latvian media, Daugavpils Mayor Rihards Eigims, at one of his first press conferences, demanded explanations from a Nasha gazeta journalist about an unsupportive article that had appeared in the paper. In addition, before the election, security police entered two editorial offices in the city and demanded to be shown the forthcoming edition of the newspaper. Hmmm.