



NCSEJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. February 10, 2017

**Summary “Current Time: The Independent Russian Language News Network”
NCSEJ, February 8, 2017**

On Tuesday, February 7, 2017, NCSEJ Research Fellow Yury Terekhov attended a discussion [“Current Time: The Independent Russian Language News Network” hosted at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC.](#)

The discussion featured Mr. Thomas Kent, President of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Ms. Amanda Bennett, Director of Voice of America; Ms. Daisy Sindelar, Director of the Current Time; and Ms. Irina Van Dusen, Director of the Russian Service of Voice of America. The panelists discussed the launch of the new VOA and RFE/RL project – Current Time – an alternative Russian language network to the Moscow-controlled media and a reality check on disinformation.

Mr. Thomas Kent said that the new network’s primary goal is to attract young viewers who have an open mind and want to know what is going on in Russia and in the world. They are doing a lot of live coverage, they line up many different viewpoints on Ukraine and other issues, and they are trying to be more thoughtful than many other Russian news outlets. He is aware that there is a lot of space for truly independent voices in Russia.

Ms. Amanda Bennett thinks that Russian audience is not satisfied by the present level of news coverage. She does not believe in a “post-truth world”, in her view, it has just become more difficult to find truth in a huge flow of information. So, fact-checking will be a very strong part of a new network’s activity. The network has strong support from the Congress and they are not expecting a change of this attitude under the new administration.

Ms. Daisy Sindelar said that the new project is the first attempt to make a 24/7 TV channel for the Russia-speaking space. It is a specific project for a specific national market, reaching Russian speakers worldwide. The network already includes Ukraine, Baltic States, Germany, and Israel, and has plans for further expansion. They are going to promote democracy, rule of law, freedom of speech and human rights.

Ms. Irina Van Dusen mentioned that Current Time is a mix of programming, they have news shows, talk shows, travel and even a food show. Her show focuses on American issues, trying to bring their viewers a window to American life and institutions, a picture of what American society is and how do people live in a democracy.

**American Chabad rabbi called security risk in Russia, ordered to leave
JTA, February 8, 2017**

<http://www.jta.org/2017/02/08/news-opinion/world/american-chabad-rabbi-called-security-risk-in-russia-ordered-to-leave>

An American rabbi who has worked for the Chabad movement in Russia since 2002 said he and his family are facing deportation under a provision dealing with threats to national security.

[Ari Edelkopf](#), a father of seven who grew up in the United States and lived in Israel before settling in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi as Chabad’s envoy there, [wrote](#) on Facebook on Sunday that he was informed of the decision without receiving further information on specific allegations.

Amid a crackdown in Russia on organizations with foreign funding, Edelkopf's staying permit was revoked in December, [according](#) to Interfax. He lost an appeal at the regional court, forcing him to leave Russia by Feb. 11. He has denied any involvement in political issues or crimes.

The Chabad-affiliated Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia condemned the move. Boruch Gorin, a federation spokesman, told the French news agency AFP that this was "far from an isolated incident." He added that at least seven rabbis have been forced to leave Russia in recent years for alleged immigration violations.

Gorin said this was "an attempt to establish control" on Jewish communities in Russia, which he said are serviced by some 70 rabbis, of whom half are foreign.

Separately, police in Moscow arrested the civil rights activist Mark Galperin on Tuesday morning on charges that he incited to extremism, the Kommersant daily reported. Galperin, who is Jewish, is accused of organizing unlicensed protest activities.

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia and other Jewish groups have praised the government of President Vladimir Putin, which critics accuse of fomenting xenophobia against Muslims and gays, for combating anti-Semitism and restituting Jewish property. At the same time, the federation has criticized expressions of anti-Semitism by officials, including from Putin's party, and steps perceived as anti-democratic.

Last year, a court in the city of Cherepovets, 250 miles north of Moscow, scrapped the association known as The Jewish Community of Cherepovets from the national register of nonprofit organizations, citing its repeated failures to file the financial activity reports required by law of such groups, the Interfax news agency reported.

The federation said this was due to a technical issue, adding the community did not meet legal requirements expected of nongovernmental associations.

The previous year, Russia's Justice Ministry placed a Jewish cultural association with ties to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee on its list of nongovernmental organizations defined as "foreign agents." The Hesed-Tshuva group is based in the city of Ryazan located 120 miles south of Moscow.

Annual "Russian Mega" Event featured Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman

eJewishPhilanthropy, February 8, 2017

<http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/annual-russian-mega-event-featured-defense-minister-avigdor-lieberman/>

The annual Mega event for 1000 Birthright participants from the FSU took place last night in Jerusalem.

For the majority of Russian speaking Birthright Israel participants, the ten day trip to Israel marks not only their first visit to the country but also an opportunity to witness Israel's vast cultural wealth, beautiful landscapes and diverse society firsthand, taking that experience with them back home to their Jewish communities.

The featured speaker was Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman who told the participants: "Just Like I arrived here as a young student from Kishinev and went on to assume some of the most significant positions of power in the state of Israel, you too have the possibility to achieve anything you chose and accomplish anything you set your mind to."

The event is a part of a comprehensive partnership between Birthright Israel and Genesis Philanthropy Group.

Jewish Opposition Activist Mark Galperin Detained in Moscow

By David Israel

Jewish Press, February 7, 2017

<http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/jewish-opposition-activist-mark-galperin-detained-in-moscow/2017/02/07/>

Civil rights activist Mark Galperin on Tuesday morning told Kommersant, a nationally distributed daily Russian newspaper devoted to politics and business, that a number of unknown had people attempted to get into his apartment, and then began to break open the door.

"Unknown people are trying to come into my home," the Jewish activist posted on his Facebook page at 8:40 AM. "After half an hour of ringing the doorbell, did not introduce themselves, and now, still shy about their identity, they're trying to open the lock, "- said the activist in his Facebook about 8:40 Moscow Standard Time (MSK). Later, Galperin wrote that he was in a "paddy wagon."

According to Irena von Burg, Galperin spent several weeks in prison in January 2015 for holding a sign that said "Je suis Charlie." He has been leading opposition walks every Saturday and calling for a democratic revolution. In this picture from January 22 he is holding a sign that says "No war in Ukraine and Syria."

Galperin's attorney Ksenia Kostromina told Tass that her client's apartment was being searched, but it is not known yet known under what pretense. Galperin is facing charges under Part. 1, Art. 280 of the Criminal Code (Incitement to extremist activity), and will be interrogated.

According to Tass, Galperin is involved repeated violations of Russian Federal Criminal Code Article 212.1 (Repeated violation of the established order of organizing or holding meetings, rallies, demonstrations, marches and pickets).

Two activists, 75-year-old Vladimir Ionov and Ildar Dadin, were sentenced in December 2015 to three years' imprisonment for violating 212.1.

Moscow's Chief Rabbi Saddened by "Total Silence" From MPs in Anti-Semitism Row

BY DAMIEN SHARKOV

Newsweek, February 8, 2017

<http://www.newsweek.com/moscows-chief-rabbi-wants-mps-response-anti-semitic-row-554148>

Moscow's top rabbi has condemned the "total silence" from Russia's parliament after its deputy speaker made comments which appeared to blame Jews for destroying cathedrals.

Pinchas Goldschmidt was referring to remarks made by Pyotr Tolstoy, the deputy speaker of Russia's lower house from the ruling United Russia party and the great-grandson of Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy had been asked to [comment on protests](#) against the planned transfer of state ownership of Russia's St Isaac's Cathedral to the Orthodox Church.

The demonstrations were featured in many [liberal media outlets](#). The protesters, Tolstoy argued, were "working in various very respectable places—on radio stations, in legislative assemblies [and] continuing the work" of their ancestors, who had "destroyed our cathedrals after jumping over from the Pale of Settlement with revolvers in 1917."

His remark sparked controversy because the Pale of Settlement is a name for the westernmost territories of Imperial Russia where Jewish communities settled after being barred from other parts of the country. The issue became even more emotive as Tolstoy made the comments only four days before International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Jewish leaders in Russia, including the head of the Jewish Communities Federation of Russia, Alexandr Boroda, said Tolstoy's words propagate an "anti-Semitic myth". He called on parliament and Tolstoy's United Russia party to give an "appropriate reaction". Tolstoy and lower house speaker Vyacheslav Volodin both denied the accusation. Tolstoy met Boroda and told him that he had not intended to make an anti-Semitic slur.

Speaking to state news agency RIA Novosti, Goldschmidt said he was disappointed that lawmakers had not distanced themselves from Tolstoy's words.

The rabbi stated that the deputy speaker's words were not simply ignorance. "Germany has the highest level of culture in Europe but it spawned Nazism," he said.

"What bothers me is something else—the reaction to this statement," Goldschmidt said. "Instead of having Pyotr Tolstoy meet with the head of the Jewish Communities Federations of Russia, Alexandr Boroda, it would have been much more effective and pleasing if the head of [his] party in the lower house, speakers and other politicians distanced themselves from the aforementioned statement and made it known that they do not agree with this opinion. But from them, all that came was total silence."

If there had been a similar situation in another country, the rabbi said, "we would have immediately seen how other non-Jewish politicians would distance themselves from such a statement. I am very saddened this did not occur here."

"Herein is the difference with Europe," Goldschmidt added. "For example, in Germany one of the leaders of the far-right party AfD Bjorn Hoek spoke in favor of de-installing the monument to the victims of the Holocaust in central Berlin. And immediately representatives of this very party distanced themselves from the politicians' words. I would like it that we too could have such a definite reaction here."

Goldschmidt said he would also like to see the International Holocaust Remembrance Day marked in parliament, following the example of the president and the prime minister, who commemorate it each year. 2017, the rabbi said, would be a good year to start the tradition, in light of Tolstoy's comments.

"This would be the best response to such statements," he added.

Kremlin Critic Kara-Murza Emerges From Coma, Condition Improving

By Carl Schreck, Mike Eckel

RFE/RL, February 9, 2017

<http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-kara-murza-emerges-from-coma-improving/28298654.html>

Kremlin critic Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr. who has been hospitalized in critical condition for the second time in two years in what his family and friends suspect was a deliberate poisoning, has awoken from a coma and improved noticeably, his lawyer and wife told RFE/RL.

Vadim Prokhorov said in a February 8 post on Facebook that his client's heart was functioning normally and that he was conscious enough to interact with his wife, though he still was unable to talk.

Yevgeniya Kara-Murza told RFE/RL that doctors have periodically disconnected her husband from a ventilator to let him breathe on his own, and that his heart and kidneys "are doing better and functioning without medication."

Kara-Murza, 35, fell ill on February 2 in Moscow and was hospitalized in an intensive-care unit. His wife said later that her husband had suffered kidney failure and was on life support after being placed in a medically-induced coma.

His family says his symptoms are almost identical to those of his near-fatal 2015 illness, also in Moscow, which he believes was the result of a deliberate poisoning in retaliation for his political activities.

A coordinator for former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky's nongovernmental organization, Open Russia, Kara-Murza has advocated before U.S. lawmakers for sanctions against Russian officials and media executives.

Earlier this week, Yevgeniya Kara-Murza said doctors had diagnosed her husband with "acute poisoning by an undetermined substance."

Yevgeniya also said that samples of her husband's blood, hair, and fingernails had been sent to a private laboratory in Israel for analysis.

She told RFE/RL that Kara-Murza was unable to speak but he was able to communicate by blinking, though "he's slightly confused and has trouble focusing, which I'm told is to be expected after [a] coma."

Kara-Murza has said he believes his May 2015 illness was the caused by a sophisticated toxin that he says would likely only be accessible to security services.

His doctors initially believed he may have suffered unintentional poisoning due to a widely prescribed antidepressant he was taking at the time, though independent toxicologists called this scenario highly unlikely.

Since the recovery from his near-fatal illness, Kara-Murza had stopped taking prescription medicines, according to family and friends.

As with his earlier illness, Kara-Murza's hospitalization has raised concerns among senior U.S. lawmakers who say he may have been targeted for assassination due to his activism.

John McCain, an influential Republican senator who is deeply critical of President Vladimir Putin, said in a speech on the Senate floor February 7 that Kara-Murza had suffered "another apparent poisoning" because "he kept faith with his ideals in confrontation with a cruel and dangerous autocracy."

Russian Activist Navalny Given 5-Year Suspended Sentence in Kirovles Retrial Moscow Times, February 8, 2017

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russian-activist-navalny-sentenced-in-kirovles-case-57038>

Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny has been given a five-year suspended prison sentence after being found guilty of embezzlement.

The decision jeopardizes his hopes of running for the Russian presidency in 2018, when Vladimir Putin is likely to seek his fourth term in office.

Navalny first stood trial on embezzlement charges in 2013, despite widespread criticism that the case was politically motivated. He was also found guilty and given a five-year suspended sentence.

The Russian Supreme Court overturned the conviction in November 2016, under pressure from the European Court of Human Rights.

The court ordered a retrial which began in January 2017. Critics described the trial as "a copy of the first," alleging that the case had been rushed in a bid to stop Navalny's presidential aspirations.

Navalny alleged that the new verdict directly copied comments on witness testimony from his previous trial, despite different testimony being put forward in the second case.

He later took a selfie from the court room, telling his Twitter followers: "I know this is contempt of court, but I couldn't resist. It's so boring in here. They're just reading out the old sentence."

Under Russian law, anyone found guilty of committing a "high-level crime" such as embezzlement is not eligible to run for office. The ban lasts for 10 years after the defendant completes their sentence.

Navalny has been a key figure in Russia's liberal opposition since 2011, when he worked with other activists to lead anti-Kremlin protests in a number of Russian cities.

The former lawyer announced his intention to run for president in December 2016, focusing on a six-point manifesto dedicated to battling corruption, boosting wages and pensions, and reforming the police and judiciary.

Navalny's campaign manager, Leonid Volkov has already pledged to continue his work despite the decision. "It's like we've already said: Navalny's campaign will continue despite the guilty verdict," he wrote on Twitter.

Criminal investigation into the desecration of the stone monument "In memory of the Jews of Mogilev - the victims of Nazism" is completed in Mogilev

Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus, January 30, 2017 (in Russian)

<http://sk.gov.by/ru/news-ru/view/v-mogileve-zaversheno-rassledovanie-ugolovnogo-dela-ob-oskvernenii-kamnja-pamjatnika-v-pamjat-o-evrejax-4034/>

The Mogilev inter-district department of the Investigative Committee completed a criminal investigation against three residents of Mogilev, accused of desecrating the stone monument dedicated "In memory of the Jews of Mogilev - the victims of Nazism."

The defendants in the case are three residents of Mogilev (two of them are minors).

The investigation established that the defendants deliberately damaged the memorial sign "In memory of the Jews of Mogilev - the victims of Nazism" on the night of November 19 by pouring the black paint on its surface. The Mogilev Jewish community suffered property damage amounting to 1,000 New Belarusian rubles (\$520).

The actions of the defendants fall under Part 2 of Article 339 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (malicious hooliganism). As a preventive measure, they have been detained.

In addition, a criminal case under Part 1, Article 172 (Involvement of a minor in the commission of a crime) has been opened against the older of the defendants.

The investigation states that one of the reasons for the crime is the lack of control over young people by parents and educational institutions.

The criminal case was sent to the prosecutor's office for referral to a court.

Belarus upholds extradition of Israeli blogger to Azerbaijan

BY TAMAR PILEGGI

Times of Israel, February 7, 2017

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/belarus-upholds-extradition-of-israeli-blogger-to-azerbaijan/>

The Belarus Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld a government decision to extradite a popular Israeli travel blogger to Azerbaijan where he will face criminal prosecution for insulting the leader of the Central Asian nation and making unauthorized visits to its disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Alexander Lapshin, 40, could be handed over to Baku authorities as early as Tuesday, reports in local news sites said.

Lapshin, who holds Russian, Israeli, and Ukrainian citizenship, appealed the Belarusian Prosecutor General's Office decision to extradite him to Baku at a lower court last month.

The Minsk City Court rejected his January 26 appeal seeking to overturn the extradition order, prompting Lapshin to turn to the Supreme Court.

No reason was given for either court's rulings, and both hearings were held behind closed doors.

A last-minute application for political asylum filed to the Minsk City Court by Lapshin's lawyer was likely to be rejected as well, Army Radio reported.

Israeli officials have sought to prevent Lapshin's extradition, but are reportedly not optimistic at the chances of success as Baku officials have made it clear the government has "no intention" of withdrawing the request.

The Foreign Ministry's spokesman confirmed to The Times of Israel on Tuesday that Jerusalem officials were aware of the developments in Lapshin's case.

"We are following the developments closely, and are in contact with all relevant parties through diplomatic and consular channels," Emmanuel Nahshon said.

In December, Azerbaijan issued an international arrest warrant for Lapshin on charges of "violating the state border" over several visits to Nagorno-Karabakh along the Armenian border without coordinating with the authorities in the capital, Baku.

Reports in Hebrew-language media said Lapshin had also published Russian-language blogs critical of Azerbaijani President Ilham Alyev.

According to Azerbaijan's Report AZ news agency, the General Prosecutor's Office in Baku said that between April 2011 and October 2012, Lapshin "entered the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, promoted illegal regime in his own website... named the Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state. He has also called on infringement of territorial integrity of internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan."

His wife, Ekaterina Kopylova, told the Haaretz daily last month that Israeli officials have been denied visits to him in jail. And MK Ksenia Svetlova (Zionist Union) has warned the Foreign Ministry that Lapshin's life could be endangered if he is extradited.

Lapshin's arrest in Minsk on December 13 at the request of the Azerbaijani government coincided with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rare visit to central Asian nation.

A secular state that has long had warm relations with Israel, the overwhelmingly Muslim Azerbaijan is one of Israel's main trading partners, buying weapons systems and providing the Jewish state with the lion's share of its oil.

During his visit, Netanyahu ahiled cooperation with Baku as a positive example of Muslim-Jewish coexistence.

Earlier this year, Armenian forces claimed Baku deployed Israeli-made kamikaze drones in a battle against them in the ongoing fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

Police in Poland raid offices of center monitoring racism and xenophobia

JTA, February 5, 2017

<http://www.jta.org/2017/02/05/news-opinion/world/police-in-poland-raid-offices-of-center-monitoring-racism-and-xenophobia>

Police raided the offices of the Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behavior in Warsaw as part of a fraud investigation.

The search Friday came at the request of the Bialystok prosecutor's office as part of its probe into fraud, counterfeiting of documents and other offenses, Lukasz Janyst, a spokesman for prosecutors in Bialystok, told reporters.

The anti-racism center said on Facebook that it operates legally and accused Poland of "turning into a police state."

Janyst said the investigation involved the theater opened by the center.

"This is an attempt to intimidate a nongovernmental organization," said Konrad Dulkowski, a member of the audit committee of the Association of Trzyrzecze Theatre, in an interview with the Gazeta Wyborcza newspaper.

Police also raided the homes of some of the board members, and reportedly seized computers and cellphones.

According to the official database of NGO organizations, the Trzyrzecze Theatre board has only one member, Rafal Piotr Gawel, who was sentenced last July to four years in prison for fraud. Gawel has appealed; his case started last week. The next hearing before the appellate court will take place on March 6.

The investigation, which spurred the search on Friday, started as a result of new information that came out during the trial in the district court.

"The Prosecutor's Office in Bialystok is leading an investigation into the falsification of dozens of documents, making a series of scams and attempted scams that took place in connection with the activities of the Association of Trzyrzecze Theatre based in Warsaw," and previously based in Bialystok, Janyst said in a statement.

Dulkowski in an interview with Gazeta Wyborcza said the association's debt is due to the revoking of a grant by the Bialystok City Council. The Bialystokonline.pl website reported that the judgment was based on the fact that Gawel "took loans, despite the fact that he realized that the collectability of receivables was small."

According to the database of NGOs, Trzyrzecze Theater also has tax arrears.

The Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, which has cooperated with the center since November, has not issued a statement on the matter.

Lithuanian President Says NATO Deployment Sends 'Clear Message' Of Unity

RFE/RL, February 7, 2017

<http://www.rferl.org/a/lithuanian-grybauskite-nato-/28294986.html>

Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė says the deployment of NATO forces in the Baltic country is sending a "very clear" message that the military alliance stands "strong and united."

Grybauskaitė spoke on February 7 at a ceremony to welcome a German battalion in the central Lithuanian town of Rukla.

The troops will head up a multinational NATO force due to reach full strength of about 1,200 members this spring.

The military deployment "significantly strengthens NATO's deterrence posture" amid "an ongoing military buildup around our borders and aggressive actions in our region," Grybauskaite said.

German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen said the military deployment made it clear that Lithuania was not alone.

NATO units are also being stationed in Poland, Latvia, and Estonia amid concerns over a resurgent Russia.

The countries requested the troops after Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in March 2014.

Moscow has denounced the buildup as an act of aggression.

Ukraine conflict: Rebel leader Givi dies in bomb attack

BBC News, February 8, 2017

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38905110>

A prominent separatist commander has been killed in eastern Ukraine, four days after another pro-Russian military leader was blown up by a car bomb.

Mikhail Tolstykh, known as Givi, died in his office in an explosion described by rebel authorities in Donetsk as a terrorist attack.

Eastern Ukraine has seen its bloodiest period of clashes since 2015, with at least 35 deaths in little over a week. Rebels have blamed Ukraine's security services for both bomb attacks.

Oleg Anashchenko, who was de facto defence minister of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), had been driving in Luhansk when his car blew up on Saturday.

The two military figures blown up in the past few days are the latest in a series of rebel commanders killed in eastern Ukraine. The conflict between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists erupted after Russia annexed Ukraine's southern Crimea peninsula in March 2014.

Ukrainians in Kiev have put the most recent killings down to infighting among rebels. Military commentator and MP Dmytro Tymchuk suggested that Givi had begun ignoring orders, particularly during the escalation of fighting at Avdiivka last week, just outside Donetsk.

Givi led the so-called Somali battalion during the rebels' successful campaign to seize control of Donetsk airport.

He was one of the best-known faces among the separatists, along with Arseny Pavlov, widely known as Motorola, who was blown up in a lift at a block of flats in Donetsk last October.

Pavlov, a Russian military veteran, was high on Kiev's wanted list, having told reporters that he had killed 15 Ukrainian prisoners.

Moscow Readies a New, Hard-Line Ambassador for Washington

BY PAUL MCLEARY, REID STANDISH

Foreign Policy, February 8, 2017

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/08/moscow-readies-a-new-hard-line-ambassador-for-washington/>

Moscow is reportedly preparing to send a new ambassador to Washington, and if history is any guide, he might end up being a great fit for the city's new policy realities.

According to a [reports](#) from [several](#) Russian news outlets on Monday, the Kremlin is considering promoting Anatoly Antonov, a hardliner who is currently Moscow's deputy foreign minister, to the post. Antonov is a well-known figure among U.S. diplomatic and foreign policy hands, several of whom characterized him as a tough, well-prepared negotiator who can also act as an unrepentant propagandist when the need arises.

"He is a force to be reckoned with," Matthew Rojansky, the director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute, told Foreign Policy. "If Moscow wants to continue to send the A-Team to Washington, then sending him makes total sense."

The 61-year-old Antonov is a career diplomat and was just appointed deputy foreign minister in December. Prior to that, he served as Russia's deputy defense minister, where he became the public face of the Kremlin's intervention in Syria to bolster President Bashar al-Assad, [spearheading](#) multiple press briefings on the issue. He was also a driving force in Moscow's 2014 incursion into Ukraine.

The Ukraine adventure — which has recently seen an uptick in fighting between Russian-backed separatists and government forces — also landed Antonov on the E.U.'s sanctions list in 2015.

Showing his ability to hit opponents hard, Antonov played a leading role in Moscow's war of words with Turkey following the shoot down a Russian jet on the Turkish-Syrian border in 2015. He famously presented Moscow's accusations that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was involved in an illegal oil trade with the Islamic State, charges that Moscow has subsequently dropped as relations have since warmed between the two countries.

The minister would also bring with him years of experience sitting across the negotiating table from American officials. He served as lead negotiator in talks to forge the New START Treaty in 2010, working with U.S. diplomat Rose Gottemoeller, current deputy secretary general at NATO. One U.S. official told FP that Antonov earned the respect of the Americans for his business-like manner in what would prove to be a quick negotiation.

After NATO's 2010 Lisbon Summit, Antonov was again one of the main negotiators with the U.S. on ballistic missile defense cooperation.

"The talks began very constructively," said Alexander Vershbow, a top Pentagon official at the time who was involved in the negotiations. But after a year of talks, the Russian team shifted tack, deciding instead to try and derail American and NATO missile deployments in Europe. "Antonov then became a brilliant obstructionist, nay-sayer, and propagandist" until Moscow ended talks with the United States and NATO in 2013, said Vershbow, who stepped down from his post as NATO's deputy secretary general in October.

Antonov also led the Russian effort in 2015 and 2016 to set up regular talks with U.S. civilian officials at the Pentagon to ensure U.S. and Russian aircraft maintained their distance in the skies over Syria.

Reporting by the Russian newspaper Kommersant indicates that Antonov had been tapped by the Kremlin months ago, when it seemed Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton would be president. Antonov's dogmatic views were seen as an asset in dealing with Clinton and navigating what the Kremlin assumed would be strained U.S.-Russia ties.

Despite Trump's upset victory and more conciliatory tone towards relations with Russia Antonov apparently still fits the bill. But he'll be landing in a very different Washington.

The Trump administration has taken a more pro-Russian stance than the Obama team, and has flirted with the idea of unilaterally dropping U.S. sanctions on Russian companies and individuals, and cooperating with Russian forces in Syria to fight the Islamic State.

An advisor to U.S. national security officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity told FP that Trump's top advisers, notably White House strategist Steve Bannon and national security advisor Michael Flynn, see Russia as a potential partner. It's "not that they're Russia lovers. They have a view that in the scheme of things, Russia is not the real problem. We need to rethink how we work with Russia, and in the end Russia can actually be — at times — a partner to deal with real problems like China and radical Islam," the official said.

Speaking at a terrorism conference in Moscow last April, Antonov came to much the same conclusion, and sounded the same warnings that have been emanating from the White House over the past several weeks.

"No one can feel safe today, nobody is living on an island," Antonov warned, adding that the only way to beat back terrorists flowing out of the Middle East is for the international community to work together. "This is what we did back in the days of World War II," he added. "What stands in the way today is political ambitions and selfish national interests of certain countries, who realize full well that they can't fight terrorism on their own," he concluded in a thinly veiled shot at the Obama administration.

But Antonov's real strength, as it has been for Russian ambassadors in the past, is arms control. "Regardless of who is in the White House, nuclear weapons is a major issue for Moscow," John Herbst, the director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center and a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, told FP.

Moscow's current envoy to the United States, Sergei Kislyak, who was appointed ambassador after Barack Obama's election in 2008, also served as deputy foreign minister before being posted to America and worked heavily on issues pertaining to nuclear nonproliferation.

And despite Antonov's reputation as a hardliner, in Washington he'll be advancing the Kremlin's marching orders, not his own.

"He's a professional, an order-taker, but not really an innovator," said Herbst. "He's someone who won't embarrass Moscow and will toe the Kremlin line, whatever that may be."

Trump Gives a Boost to Putin's Propaganda

By DAVID SATTER

Wall Street Journal, February 6, 2017

<https://t.co/xURqKifwg7>

President Trump's expression of "respect" for Vladimir Putin in [an interview](#) that aired over the weekend, and his comparison of extrajudicial killings by the Putin regime to American actions, has ushered in a new era in U.S.-Russian relations. Never before has an American president implied that political murder is acceptable or that the U.S. is guilty of similar crimes.

The goal of improved relations with the Russian president, as Mr. Trump explained, is to create the conditions for a U.S.-Russian alliance to fight Islamic State. But the result will be to cripple the Russian opposition, contribute to the propagandizing of the population, and diminish the ability of the U.S. to prevent internal and foreign Russian atrocities.

In the present atmosphere, Russian activists know they could be killed at any time. Last week Vladimir Kara-Murza, a political activist and journalist, was hospitalized with symptoms of poisoning. The motive for the poisoning may lie in statements Mr. Kara-Murza made to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee last June. In his [testimony](#), he called for the extension of sanctions under the Magnitsky Act, which imposed visa bans and asset freezes on Russian officials involved in the 2009 torture and murder of Sergei Magnitsky, an anticorruption lawyer.

Mr. Kara-Murza said sanctions should be imposed on Russian human-rights abusers including Gen. Alexander Bastrykin, at the time Russia's chief security officer and head of the Investigative Committee. Gen. Bastrykin resigned in September, and on Jan. 9 he was added to the list of those targeted by the Magnitsky sanctions.

Now Mr. Kara-Murza is in a coma, suffering from organ failure, and fighting for his life. The symptoms are identical to those he showed after being poisoned two years ago, when he was given a 5% chance of survival.

On Feb. 27, 2015, Boris Nemtsov, the leader of the Russian opposition, was shot dead as he crossed the Moskvoetsky Bridge in the shadow of the Kremlin. He was compiling a report on Russian soldiers in eastern Ukraine whose presence was denied by the government. Earlier, he advised representatives of the U.S. government on targets for sanctions after the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine.

For both Mr. Kara-Murza and Nemtsov, the violence was demonstrative. Mr. Kara-Murza was poisoned twice in the same way, and Nemtsov was shot next to the Kremlin on the most heavily guarded bridge in Moscow. These are signs that the regime is not hesitant to indicate authorship of its crimes.

The oppositionists also face social isolation. Alexei Navalny, a prominent blogger, and Mikhail Kasyanov, the former prime minister, have been physically attacked. A secretly filmed video of Mr. Kasyanov with his lover was shown on national television. Before he was killed, Nemtsov received death threats on social media. After his murder, images of his body were circulated on websites and social media, and posts denouncing him received hundreds of thousands of "likes."

In such a hostile environment, U.S. backing is an important source of moral reinforcement for Russia's political and human-rights activists. Mr. Trump's remarks instead provide reinforcement for the Putin regime's propaganda, which tries to convince Russians that the abuses they experience in their daily lives are typical of all countries.

An example was an Oct. 30 Russian news report that U.S. citizens, angered by vote fraud in the lead up to the Nov. 8 election, were ready to launch a massive demonstration in Washington, similar to the 2013-14 protests in Kiev's Maidan Square. While the story about the U.S. demonstration was fabricated, in December 2011 Russians did take to the streets to protest widespread vote fraud. The "news" item was intended to persuade them that vote fraud was also typical of the U.S.

Mr. Trump's statements suggesting that Russia and America are similar in abusing human rights and the U.S. also has "killers" will be quoted by the government, state-run media and other anti-opposition forces for years.

Mr. Trump also undermines America's moral authority, making it more difficult for the U.S. to prevent Russian atrocities. In Syria, Russian forces have deliberately targeted markets, hospitals and homes. The London-based monitoring group Airwars estimates that there were at least 3,786 civilian deaths caused by Russian bombing between Sept. 30, 2015, and Dec. 20, 2016, with the actual numbers likely far higher. Death on this scale can generate new resistance. But Mr. Trump's "respect" for Mr. Putin leaves little room for criticism. If the U.S. president is not concerned about political murders, what basis does he have for objecting to the indiscriminate meting out of death from the air?

The attempt to mollify Russia is not new. In 1999 the U.S. failed to question Russia's official explanations for the apartment bombings that brought Mr. Putin to power despite the arrest of state security agents found planting a bomb in an apartment building in Ryazan. In 2009 the Obama administration launched its "reset" policy despite the murders of Alexander Litvinenko, a former FSB agent, and Anna Politkovskaya, a leading investigative reporter, and the invasion of Georgia.

Mr. Trump's readiness to condone murder in the pursuit of an ill-advised U.S.-Russia partnership suggests that he doesn't see the distinction between defensive war and the murder of one's own people to hold on to power. Cooperation with Russia on these terms could involve the U.S. in crimes that neither the American people nor the world will accept. Mr. Trump needs to give more thought to his words—while there is still time.

U.S. Preps for Infowar on Russia

By Tim Mak

Daily Beast, February 6, 2017

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2017/02/06/u-s-preps-for-infowar-on-russia.html>

President [Trump](#) may be continuing his [public pursuit for Vladimir Putin's affections](#). But behind the scenes, the [United States](#) is quietly preparing to wage an information war against [Russia](#).

The 2016 presidential campaign alerted the public to the concept of information as a weapon—and to its incredible effectiveness when used just right. From WikiLeaks to RT to Sputnik, the [Russian government tried to sow discord among Americans](#), according to a recent U.S. intelligence report. To some extent it succeeded, by facilitating public skepticism of American institutions and the press—and undermining Hillary Clinton's campaign.

"Russia is trying to create civic chaos, questions about what is reliable, and mistrust about institutions," said Karl Altai, director of the Joint Baltic American National Committee, which advocates against Russian misinformation. "It's a national threat. This is something responsible citizens need to be aware of."

Russian intervention in the U.S. democratic process caught many American policymakers dozing at the wheel, observers say. But the dramatic nature of the intelligence community's findings, both before and after Trump's election, has woken them up.

"This was not paid much attention to until the Hillary Clinton [presidential campaign was upended by hacked and leaked emails] last summer," said Donald Jensen, a senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, a leading think-tank on Russian information warfare. "If you went around town last spring and asked senators and lawmakers if this is a problem, they would have said 'no'... People are playing catch-up."

Without fanfare, the catch-up is slowly beginning. The United States government is spending tens of millions of dollars to counter propaganda from Vladimir Putin and other state actors, a move slipped into the thousands of pages of the annual defense policy bill passed by Congress.

The great uncertainty of the new counter-propaganda initiative lies in how it will take shape under the Trump administration and whether the administration will use propaganda tools wisely and for the intended purposes of the law. Trump's public coziness with Putin puts that in question. And the new measure raises yet another question: Is giving the president another propaganda tool a good idea?

Typically, when Congress directs a response against America's enemies, it takes the form of sanctions—a targeted squeeze on an adversary's economic health. Countering propaganda and information warfare is more abstract and complex, and often goes under the radar.

But a bipartisan initiative led by Republican Sen. Rob Portman and Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy has authorized \$160 million over two years to fight propaganda state actors through a little-known interagency office housed at the State Department called the Global Engagement Center (GEC).

Bipartisan Russian sanctions legislation, proposed last month by Sens. Ben Cardin and John McCain, would expand it even further, dedicating an additional \$100 million for the GEC and others to support objective Russian-language journalism, counter "fake news," and support research on the effects of information warfare.

The interagency office, when it enters operation later this year, will mark the first centralized counter-propaganda pushback against the Russians since the 1990s, when the Cold War seemingly left such counter-propaganda obsolete.

The GEC will track foreign propaganda campaigns, analyze the tactics, and counter them through a series of grants to overseas journalists, civil-society organizations, and private companies.

“By directly countering false narratives and empowering local media and civil societies to defend themselves from foreign manipulation, this legislation will help support our allies and interests in this increasingly unstable world,” Portman told *The Daily Beast*.

The grants would go to independent organizations. For example, websites like Bellingcat and StopFake.org—which provide access to truthful information and counter false Russian narratives in Ukraine—would be eligible for these resources.

“We cannot respond to state propaganda with more state propaganda. The proper response is to use the main advantage that Western societies still have over authoritarian regimes: a really robust, pluralistic civil society,” explained Alina Polyakova, who is the Atlantic Council’s Eurasia Center deputy director and was an early supporter the GEC legislation.

The Global Engagement Center was initially created under the Obama administration to fight ISIS propaganda, but the Portman-Murphy measure expanded its scope to target propaganda from state actors, with Russia in mind as a primary antagonist. The measure also upped their funding 16-fold. The GEC originally had just \$5 million a year for operations, according to Murphy’s office.

However, information warfare remains a battlefield where the Russians are far more advanced. The concept is a formal idea in Russian declarations of their military doctrine, released publicly in 2013. And Putin puts his money where his mouth is: Polyakova estimated that Russia spends, at a bare minimum, \$400 million annually on information warfare in the United States.

“Russia has a well-thought-out, complex information strategy that seeks to influence narratives and politics and policy in Western countries... unrivaled in the scope and complexity and maliciousness,” she said.

Unlike the Cold War, Putin doesn’t need to promote Soviet-style communism: He merely has to undermine America’s democracy.

“Russia doesn’t have to sell an ideology; it just needs to exploit divisions in the West and the West’s uncertainty about its own values and what is true and what isn’t,” Jensen said. “There’s a complacency in the West... about the danger this poses.”

The United States, on the other hand, moved away from much of the anti-Russian information warfare game with the closure of the U.S. Information Agency in 1999. The resources dedicated to counter-propaganda in recent years have been focused on countering jihadi propaganda, rather than Russian—and many of these have been shown to be of dubious effectiveness.

The Center for Global Engagement, in the Obama administration’s original conception, focused on targeting would-be extremists with anti-ISIS messaging. But ISIS has had an advantage over the West’s campaign to defeat it: The United States and its allies have not been able to agree on anti-ISIS messaging.

One anti-ISIS messaging effort, which used video of the terrorist group’s savagery—crucified bodies and severed heads among them—was criticized by some experts as embarrassing and possibly even beneficial to the enemy.

And the initiatives have seemed stale, despite the efforts of Hollywood’s most talented creative minds. American officials have previously concluded that ISIS is more effective in spreading its message than the U.S. is in countering it.

Other American information-warfare efforts, such as spending \$24 million to fly a plane around Cuba, beaming U.S.-sponsored television programming that the Cuban government immediately jams, have been ill-conceived or poorly executed.

Around the turn of the decade, the United States began trying to create internet access and social-networking tools in order to empower dissidents and democracy activists, including ones in Russia. These efforts on social media networks like Twitter and Facebook backfired, as Putin viewed these tools as U.S.-backed efforts to overthrow him—and now uses these same networks to spread fake or pro-Russian news.

Still, Russia's aggressiveness and effectiveness on this front, combined with American flat-footedness, have started to attract the attention of America's intelligence community. In one of his final hearings on Capitol Hill, outgoing Director of National Intelligence James Clapper proposed that the United States reestablish an U.S. Information Agency to counter misinformation.

It's an idea that has energized lawmakers from both sides of the aisle. Both Democratic Sen. Chris Coons and Republican Sen. Todd Young spoke about countering Russian propaganda at the confirmation hearing for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

"Our enemies are using foreign propaganda and disinformation against us and our allies, and so far the U.S. government has been asleep at the wheel. We have to delegitimize false narratives coming out of Russia, China and other nations and increase access to factual information," Portman told The Daily Beast. "We need to get the law implemented and the new center up and running so it can help confront the extensive, and destabilizing, foreign propaganda and disinformation operations being waged against us by our enemies overseas."

If anything, Trump knows the powers of using new mediums, such as social media, for counter-messaging—with widespread effects. As presidential pal and notorious conspiracy theorist Alex Jones might say, there's a war on for your mind.

Senate Foreign Relations takes hard line on Russia

BY JOE UCHILL

The Hill, February 9, 2017

<http://www.thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/318745-sen-foreign-policy-hearing-takes-hard-line-on-russia>

There was bipartisan agreement in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Thursday that the legislative branch should take decisive action against Russia, even if that means circumventing the White House's expressed desire for a better relationship between the two nations.

Ranking member [Ben Cardin](#) (D-Md.) and several other senators advocated for recently proposed bipartisan legislation that would take decisions about Russian sanctions out of the hands of the White House at the hearing on "The United State, the Russian Federation and the Challenges Ahead."

Cardin noted the bill is modeled on similar legislation regarding the Iran nuclear deal that was crafted by several committee members.

Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Phillip Breedlove and Strategy and Statecraft Director Julianne Smith of the Center for New American Strategy told the panel it is critical to keep up a hard-line approach against Russia -- including maintaining sanctions.

"It would be a sign of weakness to ease those sanctions for anything less than full compliance with Minsk," said Breedlove, referring to two summits between Russia and other world powers that set limits on Moscow's role in Ukraine.

There was so much agreement between the witnesses that Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) joked it was hard to tell which was a Republican and which was the Democrat.

His quip prompted Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) to open his questions by asking who was who.

"I've listened to the testimony, I can't tell which one is which," he said.

Members of both parties also advocated for a special commission to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, criticizing the pace of the not-yet-in-swing investigations from committees including the House and Senate intelligence panels.

"An investigation that goes on for two years isn't an investigation. It's an obstruction," charged Sen. Jean Shaheen (D-N.H.).

Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) agreed.

"We are five weeks into this Congress. Pretty soon we will be 10 weeks. Then we will be 15 weeks. I don't know how we expect Europe to take a strong stand against Russian interference," if the U.S. is not, he said.

Members of the committee also used the hearing to push back against President Trump's recent statements that some saw as a comparison of moral equivalence between the U.S. and Russia.

Trump told Bill O'Reilly in a Sunday interview that he respects Putin, prompting the Fox News host to call Putin a "killer."

"We've got a lot of killers. What do you think — our country's so innocent?" Trump retorted.

"Let me say one word about something that concerned me -- Mr. Trump trying to drive a moral equivalence between the murderous activities of Mr. Putin and activities in our own country," Cardin said Thursday.

"There is no equivalence whatsoever," he added.

Corker quickly agreed.

"I see no moral equivalence — none — between ourselves and the actions Russia has taken," he said.

Corker later expressed disappointment with other comments from the same Trump interview regarding whether Russia directed the recent annexation of Ukraine.

"Despite the unfortunate statements that end up being made, there are folks within the administration with a very, very, very different point of view. And I think us working with them to create policies with them that we would support is something we can play a role in doing," he added.

Meet the Progressive Russian Immigrants Fighting Trump — and Their Own Families By Samantha Shokin

Forward, February 7, 2017

<http://forward.com/opinion/362416/meet-the-progressive-russian-immigrants-fighting-trump-and-their-own-famili/>

Emblazoned in handwritten Cyrillic on Olga Tomchin's back is a word that has come to embody so much more than its literal definition. *Pozor*, Russian for "disgrace" (or *shanda* in Yiddish) has become a rallying cry for a movement of Soviet-born millennials defying their families' ideologies and banding together in opposition to Donald Trump. Like so much else, the *pozor* meme emerged from the Internet, but has now taken on a life of its

own, permeating IRL conversations among my immigrant kin and shining a spotlight on the ideological split devastating so many of our families. And in Tomchin's case, the tattoo serves as a daily reminder of the disobedience, civil or otherwise, that has defined her life.

Born in Minsk, Belarus in 1988 to a half-Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, Tomchin, 28, grew up watching her family bear the brunt of anti-Semitism. The Soviets barred her father from attending certain universities and forced him into military conscription because he was a Jew. As ethnic tensions escalated in the final days of the crumbling Soviet regime, Olga was sent to her maternal grandparents' village out of a fear of pogroms. In 1993, her family was resettled with refugee status in Omaha, Nebraska as part of the United Jewish Appeal's [Operation Exodus](#).

The refugee experience inspired Tomchin's decision to pursue refugee and immigration work. After finishing Berkeley Law with a focus on trans and queer immigration, she landed her first job as a Soros Justice Fellow at the Transgender Law Center, and had long been involved in activism when a realization struck:

"I would attend conferences with activists and would never meet other Soviet immigrants, despite the fact that there are so many of us," recalls Tomchin. "When the election happened and people were organizing, I thought, 'I've been looking for my community for years. I'm not finding it, so I might as well start it myself.'"

Two days after the presidential election, Tomchin launched the Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants Facebook group. When I first joined the group a couple of months ago, it had less than 200 members and primarily served as online group therapy. Members would commiserate over the more traumatizing aspects of growing up in an immigrant household, including coping with racist relatives. But the group grew quickly, amassing more than 2600 members, and evolving into a grassroots platform for first-and-second generation Americans to exchange ideas and mobilize.

With the creation of her group, Tomchin filled an immense need, carving out a space for the formerly ostracized members of our community. And it's no surprise that progressives among us feel ostracized — after all, anyone reading media portrayals of Soviet immigrants may be under the impression that we all march to the same right-wing, Zionist, pro-Trump beat. Having fled the USSR, the logic goes, immigrants now shun any and all things vaguely socialist. As I wrote in the Times of Israel back in November:

One trend piece after another after another made clear what many of us growing up in the community had always known — that immigrants from the former Soviet Union tend to lean to the right. And yet, what each of those articles consistently failed to do, was explain that not only are Russian-speaking immigrants not a monolith, but there are a great many factions within the community that are effectively tearing it apart.

Now, three months after Trump's election, not only is my community still reeling from the force of this seismic divide, but Tomchin and others like her are battling back, debunking the notion that our politics are unified and in lockstep with the Trump-Putin administration.

The group's proudest accomplishment so far has been the creation and promulgation of the "Soviet Jewish Refugee Solidarity Letter," written in opposition to Trump's recent refugee ban. As of February 5th, the letter attracted more than 1,100 signers, including the likes of Masha Gessen, Gary Shteyngart, and Regina Spektor. It reads:

"On the basis of our Jewish values and our own experiences as Soviet Jewish refugees, we stand in solidarity with refugees fleeing Syria, Central America, and oppression and death throughout the world...Many of us are children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, and we are all too aware how xenophobia prevented the United States from mounting an adequate moral response before and during World War II to Jewish refugees fleeing genocide."

In addition to advocating for the protection of refugees, the letter had a subsequent goal. "So much media coverage of Soviet Jews during the election had involved interviewing conservative babushki and dedushki and

saying 'they speak for the community,'" Tomchin frets. "This letter is to say they do not speak for us...As Jewish refugees, we have moral claim on this issue and will not let people slander our community by hijacking our identities."

Sure enough, not all responses have been positive. One of the letter's co-writers, Vlad Khaykin, a Soviet-Jewish refugee and activist who works for the Central Pacific Branch of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), received an anti-Semitic threat just days after it was published: "I don't care what we have done. No apologies. And if your people don't stop pushing. 6 [sic] million will seem like a walk in the park," read the email, signed "Adolf Himmler."

"It's par for the course when you work at ADL," acknowledges Vlad, for whom anti-Semitic slurs are regrettably familiar — even from members of his own community. He recalls one instance of being called "Judenrat" and "kapo" by Soviet Jews when explaining ADL's position on refugees. "We can't discount the power of internalized racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, nativism, homophobia. That's a real phenomenon. To a large degree that's happened within the community. We fled authoritarianism and xenophobia but weren't able to leave it behind. A lot of time, you see that same suspicion of the Other."

Fortunately, with the letter having appeared in Jewish media and at least one (albeit right-wing) Russian newspaper, Tomchin, Khaykin, and the rest of the Soviet activist cohort have something to show for our efforts. But restoring relations within the increasingly polarized Soviet immigrant community will be an uphill battle. Many families have been torn apart in this political climate, mine included.

But perhaps all is not lost. After all, all happy families are alike and stay out of politics, right?

"A lot of us were taught by our families not to protest, that it's futile," says Tomchin. "This is the opposite. We're socializing our people to understand how to be political actors while embodying our identities and histories. We're saying it's possible to do that, and to lead by example."

'Orgy of murder': The Poles who 'hunted' Jews and turned them over to the Nazis

By Ofer Aderet

Haaretz, February 9, 2017

<http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-1.770707?=&ts= 1486651354006>

More than 200,000 Jews were killed, directly or indirectly, by Poles in World War II, says historian Jan Grabowski, who studied the brutal persecution of the victims. His conclusion: There were no bystanders in the Holocaust.

Last month, the Polish-born historian Jan Grabowski won a lawsuit he filed against a Polish website. About 18 months earlier, the site had launched a savage attack on him under the headline, "Sieg Heil, Mr. Grabowski," accompanied by a photograph of the Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels.

That followed the publication of a favorable report in a German newspaper about Grabowski's book "Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland." The book describes the Polish population's involvement in turning in and murdering Jews who asked for their help during the Holocaust.

The editors of the right-wing site Fronda.pl criticized Grabowski for washing Poland's dirty World War II laundry in full international view. But what upset the editors most was that the book drew praise in, of all places, Germany, which was responsible for the war. "So, the argument went, if the Germans praise Grabowski, then Grabowski is a Nazi," Grabowski, 55, explained in an email interview with Haaretz from Ottawa, where he teaches.

Grabowski, whose father was a Holocaust survivor and whose research focuses on the crimes perpetrated by the Poles in the war, decided not to take it lying down. He won a lawsuit against the website's owner, Tadeusz Grzesik, last September. At the end of January, the owner lost the appeal as well; he was sentenced to do community service work, pay a fine of 3,000 zloty (\$750) to Children of the Holocaust — an organization of Polish survivors who were children during the war — and to publish an apology.

“As you can see, writing history in Poland, about Poland, is not boring at all,” Grabowski said.

On a more serious note, he added, “As a Polish historian, I think that trying to cover up the less glorious aspects of our own national past – something that’s being done today in Poland with a lot of enthusiasm – is a crime against our profession. It is also unethical and, in the long run, counterproductive and silly.”

Grabowski’s book was first published in his native land in 2011, and two years later in English, by Indiana University Press. A revised and expanded edition, in Hebrew translation, has now been published by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial authority in Jerusalem.

The research underlying the book is the fruit of a three-year archival journey embarked upon by Grabowski in pursuit of a phenomenon called “hunting for Jews.” The term, which originates in the German word *Judenjagd*, refers to the murderous search for Jews who succeeded in escaping from the ghettos and sought haven from their compatriots in occupied Poland.

Grabowski’s book concentrates on a rural region of southeastern Poland called Dabrowa Tarnowska. Of its population of 60,000 on the eve of the war, 5,000 were Jews, almost all of whom were deported to the death camp Belzec. Of 500 who managed to escape and hide among the Poles, only 38 survived the war. All the others, as Grabowski discovered, were betrayed and murdered in direct or indirect ways by their Polish neighbors. The events described in “Hunt for the Jews,” notes the historian Timothy Snyder (author of “Bloodlands”), constitute “an inquiry into human behavior in dark times from which all can learn.”

Drawing on Polish, Jewish and German records from the war and postwar periods, Grabowski was able to document the local population’s involvement in turning over and murdering the Jews who sought their help – but also the heroism of Poles who tried to rescue their Jewish neighbors and sometimes paid for it with their lives.

Between these two extremes, Grabowski also found more complex cases: of Poles who helped Jews not for altruistic and moral reasons, but out of greed. In this connection, his study challenges the prevailing opinion, according to which most of those who proffered help were “righteous.” He describes no few instances in which Poles saved Jews and then extorted money from them, and in some cases murdered them if they didn’t get what they wanted.

Exclusive: In First Talk With Jewish Media, Hungary’s Far Right Leader Strikes a New Pose

By Lili Bayer

Forward, February 9, 2017

<http://forward.com/news/world/362663/exclusive-in-first-talk-with-jewish-media-hungarys-far-right-leader-strikes/>

Gabor Vona, who heads Hungary’s far-right party, Jobbik, famously showed up on his first day as a member of Parliament in 2010 wearing the uniform of a banned racist and an anti-Semitic paramilitary group.

But the morning of Wednesday, February 1, sitting in his office overlooking the partially frozen Danube River, Vona was dressed in a simple gray suit for his first-ever interview with a Jewish publication.

The 38-year-old leader of one of Europe’s most electorally successful far-right movements once said that “if it turned out about me that I were Jewish, then I would resign from my position.”

But as he sat down for his interview with the Forward, Vona projected a different, cordial — and at times even friendly — tone.

“Hungarian Jews have such serious trauma that it makes working together more difficult,” he said reassuringly. “This could change, perhaps in my generation or with young Jewish people now entering the active phase in

their lives and getting into positions of responsibility. If we are able to extend hands to one another and understand each other, perhaps we can open a new chapter.”

He added: “If Jobbik comes to power, the Hungarian Jewish community can continue living its daily life as it has. We don’t want conflict with the Jewish community.”

With national elections in 2018 looming, Vona, who is infamous for his long record of anti-Semitic stands, is trying to shift his party’s public image and portray himself as a tolerant politician.

Last December, Vona sent a letter to the Hungarian Jewish community, conveying Hanukkah greetings — an unprecedented move for the far-right politician.

But Vona’s new rhetorical support for tolerance contrasts greatly with his past statements and with his actions, as well as with the ideology that he has nurtured over the past decade within Jobbik — today, Hungary’s second-largest party.

In 2012, Jobbik’s vice president, Márton Gyöngyösi, speaking in Parliament, called for the creation of a list of Jews in Hungary’s government. That same year, another Jobbik member of Parliament, Zsolt Baráth, gave a speech accusing the Jewish community of blood libel, referring to an infamous 19th-century case when Hungarian Jews were wrongfully accused of murdering a young girl.

Vona himself has engaged in strong racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric over the past years. In one open letter in 2013 to Israel’s then-ambassador to Hungary, Ilan Mor, Vona wrote: “I find it distasteful if any nation or people wants to rule the world. The Jewish people, too. And I see this arrogance in your behavior.”

“I won’t be Israel’s dog,” he wrote.

In 2013, at a so-called “anti-Bolshevik, anti-Zionist” rally against a World Jewish Congress meeting in Budapest, Vona told the crowd that “Israeli conquerors, these investors, should look for another country in the world for themselves, because Hungary is not for sale.”

But the far-right leader now says that his views on Israel have always been consistent.

“We have criticisms of elements of Zionism,” he told me in his office. “But I never questioned Israel’s existence.”

“Our position is that there are two states, Israel and Palestine.”

He also said that Jobbik’s position is based on resolutions passed in the United Nations and that he hopes for peace in the region.

As an example of his party’s current tolerance, Vona pointed to one of Jobbik’s spokesmen, Péter Jakab, a practicing Catholic of Jewish origin whose grandparents survived the Holocaust.

As Vona spoke amid the simplicity of his neat office, his continuing ultra-nationalist ideological leanings could be seen plainly in a map hanging on his bookcase, portraying pre-World War I Hungary. Parts of modern-day Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Italy and Slovakia were encompassed within Hungary’s borders, and keeping the memory of Greater Hungary alive is part of Jobbik’s political agenda.

Vona was also one of the founders in 2007 of the Hungarian Guard (Magyar Gárda), a paramilitary organization that was later ruled illegal and forced to formally disband. The Hungarian Guard’s mission included protecting Hungarians from so-called “Gypsy crime,” and the group physically intimidated members of Hungary’s Roma community. Some of the perpetrators of a series of racially motivated murders of Roma in 2008 and 2009, including the killing of a 5-year-old, were found to have connections to the Guard.

In his interview, when asked about his party's past rhetoric, Vona responded with a mix of denial and an emphasis that Jobbik is changing. Of his party colleague's blood libel accusations against the Jewish community, Vona said, "At the time of the statement, we already said we do not agree."

In fact, when asked about the blood libel speech controversy during a 2012 press interview shortly after it occurred, Vona told the Hungarian newspaper *Mandiner* that Jobbik is a "diverse party" on some issues, with members sharing the same "basic values." He made no serious effort to criticize or disagree with his colleague.

As for the case of Gyöngyösi, the Jobbik parliament member and party vice president who proposed creating a list of Jews in government, Vona said, "After his statement, Gyöngyösi himself clarified that he means he wasn't just thinking about [listing] Jews or Israeli dual citizens ... but all double citizens."

Vona contended that he had taken steps to ensure that Jobbik members understood that bigotry was unacceptable. "Over the past two or three years I made it clear that there is no place for any racism or anti-Semitism in the party," he said. In fact, he added, "There are already sanctions for anti-Semitism."

Asked for examples, he offered, "When a fellow member of Parliament wrote something anti-Semitic... I sent him down to lay a flower at the shoes memorial on the riverbank" — a reference to "Shoes on the Danube Bank," a memorial erected in memory of those shot and thrown into the Danube River by members of the fascist Hungarian Arrow Cross during World War II.

Founded by a group of students, Jobbik is particularly popular among young Hungarians and people living outside the capital, Budapest. The party has honed an image as a social, media-savvy, youthful group that appeals to both anti-establishment sentiments and century-old nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiments.

But observers agree that with parliamentary elections next year, Jobbik faces a fateful crossroads. Under Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister since 2010, and his right-wing nationalist party, Fidesz, the country has taken what domestic and international critics see as an increasingly authoritarian turn. Orbán's government has adopted anti-refugee policies, building a wall along Hungary's southern border, and a strong Euroskeptic stance. In essence, the ruling Fidesz party has adopted many of Jobbik's ideas, leaving the far-right party's leadership searching for a way to set itself apart.

Jobbik won 20% of the popular vote in the country's 2014 election, making it Hungary's No. 2 party. But faced with competition from the governing party for right-wing votes and the stigma, in the eyes of some voters, of its racist and anti-Semitic sentiments, Jobbik, in its present form, faces a possible ceiling on its support. To compete successfully for power, or at least for a position in a coalition government, Jobbik would have to reach out to new constituencies, including voters who may be attracted to Jobbik's ideas on improving economic conditions and combating corruption but are uncomfortable with racist and anti-Semitic elements of its ideology.

In late January, Vona said in an interview with Hungarian television that voters do not necessarily have to agree with the party's Christian, conservative ideals in order to support Jobbik. According to Vona, Jobbik welcomes any Hungarian who believes that "Hungary does not belong to Viktor Orbán, Hungary belongs to Hungarians."

In his interview with the *Forward*, Vona seemed to acknowledge that Jobbik could not reposition itself by simply snapping its fingers and telling voters to forget the party's — or Hungary's — history. Instead, he proposed that Jobbik could work with Jews and more liberal segments of the population while it continued to hold fast to its own version of national memory and the other groups held fast to theirs. There was no pressing need, he seemed to say, to resolve whose version was accurate.

"I won't deny that, unfortunately, the Hungarian Christian and Hungarian Jewish intelligentsia have long had disagreements," he said. "If we look at the history of the 20th century, then almost for every important or tragic moment there are two versions in people's heads. I won't say what's right. Who am I to say who's right or what happened exactly?"

“All I’m saying is... it’s better to show understanding and respect, and to focus on the future.”

The “disagreements” Vona was referring to are, in part, connected to his movement’s reverence for the map hanging behind him showing Hungary’s more sprawling borders before World War I.

Far-right nationalist Hungarians believe the 20th century’s biggest tragedy was the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, which led to the loss of two-thirds of the country’s territory.

At the same time, Hungarian nationalists tend to overlook and minimize the tragedy of the Holocaust in their country. Hungary was a Nazi ally during World War II, and Hungarian society, unlike Germans, never took responsibility for its role in the murder of 600,000 Hungarian Jews. Moreover, some far-right Hungarians associate the Jewish community with Communist rule. Anti-Semitic Hungarian publications and politicians at times point to the Jewish origins of many of the country’s early Communist leaders.

The far-right leader maintains that Jewish and Christian Hungarians should put the 20th century behind them. He sees the 19th century as the golden age of relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians, and a template he would like to emulate.

In the 19th century, “Hungarian Jews were patriotic; they took part in the freedom fight in 1848 and 1849. Wouldn’t it be great if we returned to this, and Jewish people once again could consider Hungary their home?” he said.

But when asked about specific civil rights issues in Hungary, like the segregation of Roma children in schools, Vona did not set aside his old views completely.

“It is constructive not to think in black-and-white terms,” Vona said. “There are situations when integration is needed, and situations when segregation is needed. Segregation is not a great word, but ... there are situations when separation is best for the children.”

For Jewish experts and observers, and for many members of the Hungarian Jewish community, Vona’s new friendly attitude appears far from credible. His unwillingness to address Hungary’s role in the Holocaust is among the points that rankle.

“The disagreement of the post-Holocaust period in Hungary is not only between ‘the Hungarian Christian and Hungarian Jewish intelligentsia,’ but between the survivors — all the surviving Jews of Hungary — and the successive post-World War II Hungarian governments that consistently refused to acknowledge and accept responsibility for the role the [Miklós] Horthy regime played in the destruction of close to 600,000 patriotic Jews,” said Randolph Braham, a Hungarian-born history professor emeritus at City University of New York and a leading expert on the Holocaust in Hungary.

“When Vona takes the initiative to publicly and courageously admit the real disagreements between Christians and Jews in general and offer a public apology for the Hungarian Christians’ role in the Holocaust, I would be ready to take him seriously,” Braham said.

Many also cited Vona’s failure to take more serious steps to address racism and anti-Semitism within his party’s own ranks.

These are “empty words uttered by a quite controversial politician with a rather checkered past,” said Rabbi Ferenc Raj, a Hungarian-American Holocaust survivor who serves as the founding rabbi of Congregation Bet Orim, in Budapest, and as rabbi emeritus of Congregation Beth El, in Berkeley, California. “I strongly believe that first he and his followers must repent.”

Citing Maimonides, Raj evoked three steps to repentance: regret, rejection and resolution — resolving, with strong determination, not to do it again.

“It is not enough to change the ideology of the party, you have to change the people,” said Raj.

What America might want from Russia, but is unlikely to get
Economist, February 11, 2017

<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21716612-vladimir-putin-could-do-very-well-out-donald-trump-what-america-might-want-russia>

FOR decades, Russian leaders insisted that America had no claim to moral superiority. For every Soviet and post-Soviet misdeed, from labour camps to invasions, they adduced an American counterpart. Such equivalence was anathema to American statesmen, who claimed to abide by higher standards.

Until now. In an interview with President Donald Trump broadcast on February 5th, Bill O'Reilly of Fox News described Vladimir Putin as a “killer”. A nod from Mr Trump seemed to allow that this might be the case, which would in itself have been an arresting evaluation of another head of state. The president then went on to say that there were “a lot of killers” and to question whether his own country was “so innocent”. His tough-talk tarnishing of America's reputation was unprecedented. But the equivalence it posits sits easily with the way Mr Trump seems to see Mr Putin's Russia: as a potential partner.

In 2016 Mr Trump was consistently effusive about Mr Putin—“very smart!”—contrasting his popularity among Russians favourably with Barack Obama's standing in American polls. He poured scorn on evidence that the Kremlin was behind the hacking of Democratic bigwigs' e-mails during the election campaign, preferring to denigrate America's intelligence agencies. Kompromat or collusion have been suggested as possible explanations for this unshakable warmth. Official inquiries—if they are allowed to proceed—may shed light on claims that Mr Trump's campaign team collaborated with Moscow.

Scattered comments by the president and his aides imply an alternative explanation: the administration envisages a grand diplomatic bargain with Russia that encompasses arms control, counter-terrorism, the status of Crimea, economic sanctions and relations with China, an arrangement in which the two leaders indomitably face down all comers like some maverick geopolitical wrestling team.

This stance does not just go against the views of those Republicans who, along with much of America's foreign-policy establishment, regard Mr Putin as a gangster. It also contradicts Mr Trump's two predecessors. Mr Obama blithely wrote Russia off as an irksome regional power, nuclear-armed and prone to harassing its neighbours but doomed to decline into irrelevance. George W. Bush, who on meeting Mr Putin professed to have looked into his soul and to have liked what he saw, later oscillated between symbolic protests against the Kremlin's depredations and fitful efforts to ignore them.

This all means that any bargain will face opposition in Congress and quite possibly even in Mr Trump's cabinet. Still, public opinion provides an opening: polls suggest Mr Putin is viewed more favourably, and his country less warily, than before Mr Trump embraced him. In Russia state propaganda has burnished Mr Trump's image and soothed anti-Americanism.

In terms of style, the putative tag team looks rather well matched. Neither is fond of the liberal, rules-based global order. Both can lie without blushing. It is easy to imagine Mr Trump sharing Mr Putin's approach to diplomacy, too. Like the Russian, he seems sure to prefer bilateral deals to messy supranational bodies and is likely to define America's national interest in narrowly military and commercial terms. Both men seem willing to link disparate issues and regions in a general barter. Neither is much exercised by human rights. Both regard the humiliation of adversaries as a salutary exercise of power.

Buttering up the butcher

Yet as a means to further Mr Trump's avowed goals in the Middle East and elsewhere the idea has three deep flaws. One is the damage it would do to America's existing alliances and international reputation. The second

lies in the immutable realities of great-power relations, underpinned by history and geography that no deal-making can wholly negate. The last is that Mr Trump seems to be making a classic presidential beginner's mistake in dealing with the Kremlin, one that Mr Bush committed when looking for a soul and that Mr Obama made when he attempted a "reset" in relations with Russia in 2009: wishful thinking.

The first thing Mr Trump seems to want is an ally against the so-called Islamic State (IS). His notion that Russian forces have been battling IS in Syria is mistaken: they have mostly bombed other opponents of Bashar al-Assad, Mr Putin's client. But that could change—especially, observes Andrew Tabler of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, now that Mr Assad's own position in Damascus looks more secure.

What, though, could Russia offer? Mr Putin's way of war, in Aleppo as in Grozny, makes use of indiscriminate bombardment and deliberate targeting of civilians; Russian air power might thus be used against Raqqa and other IS strongholds in ways that American aircraft cannot. But even if that were acceptable, it would hardly be a solution. It is only by occupying territory that IS can be beaten; and Russia offers little by way of boots on the ground.

Russia has no need for ground troops in Syria because its forces are in de facto alliance with those of Hizbullah and Iran. This throws into sharp relief differences between America and Russia on who counts as a terrorist. Mindful of Russia's 20m Muslims, Mr Putin has been as tactful as was Mr Obama in separating the concepts of Islam and terrorism. He has said the Orthodox church can be seen as having more in common with Islam than with Catholicism, and that "Islam is an outstanding element of Russia's cultural make-up, an organic part of our history." His grotesque satrap in Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, enforces sharia (Islamic law) there.

Beyond Mr Putin's awkward mix of brutality, cynicism and cultural pragmatism, there is the problem that a Syrian settlement palatable to the White House, let alone America's Sunni Arab partners—whose support would be crucial for any forces actually taking territory from IS—would have to see Iran's influence minimised. But Russia would be very hard put to acquiesce in such a plan. Its relationship with Iran, while testy, is more nuanced than the White House seems to realise.

Iran is Russia's neighbour across the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus. The two vie for influence there and in Central Asia. Because an Iranian nuclear bomb would threaten Russia's primacy in the region, Russia was happy to take a role in the deal that constrained Iran's nuclear programme. But proximity also makes Mr Putin wary about antagonising the Iranians. As Nikolay Kozhanov of the European University at St Petersburg says, the Russians have interests at stake that the Americans do not, including energy projects and pipelines in and around the Caspian. They want to sell Iran arms, including surface-to-air-missiles and civilian nuclear power plants; they need to co-operate with Iran to keep Mr Assad in power. They are very unlikely to want to tear up the nuclear deal, something Mr Trump has threatened.

On a bigger scale, the same factors—geography, security and commerce—would nobble any bid by Mr Trump to conscript Russia as a bulwark against China. The civility he has conspicuously extended to Mr Putin has not applied to Xi Jinping, whom Mr Trump angered over Taiwan even before he took office. As Dimitri Simes of the Centre for the National Interest, a think-tank, notes, American diplomats have worried about Sino-Russian cosiness for decades. Stephen Bannon, Mr Trump's influential strategist, undoubtedly sees China as a major adversary. A bid to realign the three powers lies at the heart of Mr Trump's grand bargain.

This may be even less realistic than the hope of turning Russia against Iran. China and Russia are hardly close allies. Among other reasons for mistrust, the old Russian anxiety over Chinese expansion in Siberia, a fear stoked by the lopsided populations on either side of the Amur river, has never gone away. But Mr Putin began a pivot towards Asia in the mid-2000s, well before Mr Obama undertook his own version of such a manoeuvre. Initially a feint as much as a strategy, one conceived as a response to what Mr Putin saw as Western hostility, it has since acquired substance. Alexander Lukin, of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, sees it as "largely irreversible". When Western sanctions over Russia's incursions into Ukraine in 2014 began to bite, China became a valuable source of credit. It has invested in Russian oil-and-gas firms; Russia sells it high-tech weapons.

Other benefits America might seek in a grand bargain include a reduction of Russia's campaign of bullying and destabilisation in the Baltic states and movement on arms control. Here, again, the scope for progress is narrow. A deal on long-range nuclear weapons which limits both countries to 1,550 deployed warheads is set to expire in 2021. Mr Trump could extend it, or try to reduce that cap; he might also want to do something about Russia's huge numerical advantage in tactical nuclear weapons. But America's missile-defence capabilities—which Russia sees as a threat to its deterrence—would be dragged into any such negotiations, and the missile-defence facilities in Europe are there to deal with Iran. A deal which reduced their capability should—at least in a normal world, and assuming Congress is not wholly supine—be hard for Mr Trump to swallow, or sell.

The bear's necessities

In much of this, Mr Trump seems to overestimate Russia's clout as well as its alignment with his goals. He mistakes the strut of a bully for the swagger of a superpower. The "strength" he admires relies on strategic assets handed down from the Soviet past—its Security Council seat and nuclear weapons—and its hydrocarbon reserves, bolstered by Mr Putin's knack for asymmetric thuggery. Unrestrained by allies, scruple or domestic opposition, he is a dab hand at disinformation and discrediting critics whom he does not dispose of in other ways. But his Russia is more of a prickly, meddling power than a global, transformative one. Diplomatic isolation and an economy throttled by corruption frustrate any grander ambitions.

Russia can, however, seize an opportunity; and Mr Trump presents it with one, whatever role Mr Putin had in his rise to power. (While Mr Trump did not take the intelligence regarding Russian hacking seriously, Mr Putin evidently did. Several officers of Russia's federal security service have been arrested for treason in what may be a hunt for a cyber-mole. A senior Kremlin insider was found dead, supposedly of a heart attack.)

Relief on sanctions is the most obvious item on the Kremlin's agenda for Mr Trump's presidency, one that would have the double effect of helping Russia's economy and dividing America's allies. But other things may matter to Mr Putin more. Obliging, Channel One, Russia's main state television channel, provided a list of them a few days after Mr Trump's inauguration—a list which sounded rather more achievable than Mr Trump's objectives.

First was that anti-terror alliance, for "nothing brings [countries] together as much as a fight against a common enemy." Second, Russia wants to stop any further expansion of NATO after the accession of Montenegro. Countries barred might well include Sweden or Finland, and would definitely include Ukraine. Mr Trump's description of NATO as "obsolete" has been welcome. If Russia were to meddle in its Baltic neighbours, cabinet members who profess devotion to the alliance, such as Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state, and James Mattis, the secretary of defence, might struggle to persuade Mr Trump to honour the commitment to mutual defence at its core. If he did not, NATO would in effect be dead: the ultimate prize for Mr Putin.

Third on Channel One's list was the recognition of Crimea as Russian territory, along with a de-facto veto over Ukraine's future. The Kremlin wants to retain its grip on the country's wretched east—where fighting has flared up again—and so secure a stranglehold on its policies (see article). Conversely, America and its partners have insisted on a withdrawal of Russian troops, the re-establishment of Ukraine's control of its borders, and regional elections monitored by international observers.

Here, on the face of it, the signs are not encouraging for Mr Putin. Mr Tillerson affirmed in his confirmation hearing that the annexation of Crimea, and Russia's push into eastern Ukraine, were illegal. But Mr Trump could resolve this contradiction by arguing that accepting Russia's hold on Crimea would only be to acknowledge reality. Using the same rationale, he may urge Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's president, to tolerate Russia's sway in the east. That, in turn, could trigger a collapse of the government in Kiev, which would suit Mr Putin. Because Mr Poroshenko's government played a role in the ousting of Paul Manafort, at one time a senior figure in Mr Trump's campaign, it might be welcome in Washington, too.

Remember the Decembrists

Fourth on Channel One's list was an end to "global policing" by America, and a clear recognition of the two countries' spheres of influence. That sounds extravagant. But it may be plausible. Apart from the odd hotel deal, Mr Trump has evinced little interest in the parts of the world—eastern Europe, the Balkans and the former Soviet Union—that Mr Putin would like to suborn. Mr Trump "has no intention of carrying the torch of democracy into every corner of the world", observed Valery Fadeev, Channel One's anchor. Not on the list, but worth bearing in mind, is that Mr Trump's opposition to global action on climate may look helpful to a country that depends on oil and gas exports.

The Kremlin does not expect immediate concessions. According to Nikki Haley, America's new ambassador to the UN, sanctions relief is not imminent. Contradictory reports about what Mr Trump has said to Mr Poroshenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, one of his political opponents, suggest that he is either undecided or confused about the next steps in Ukraine. Yet the ideological value of Mr Trump's victory for Russia is already enormous. It removes one of the biggest threats to Mr Putin's power: the attraction of America as an alternative system of governance to the authoritarian model he has constructed.

His is not a new worry. Soviet and Russian leaders have in the past venerated America as well as demonising it. (Stalin advocated a "combination of Russian revolutionary élan with American efficiency".) They knew its example encouraged rebels and idealists. The Decembrist revolt of 1825, in which army officers rose against Tsar Nicholas I, took inspiration from the Declaration of Independence. In 1917 some pro-revolution Russians saw America as a guiding star: Russia was to be a new America, a better and fairer one. The Soviet authorities tried, largely in vain, to root out American books, music and clothes.

They were right to be concerned: America's successes undermined Soviet rule. After communism collapsed, America became an ideal. That started to change after Russia's financial meltdown in 1998 and the American-led intervention in Kosovo. With Russia unable to compete economically or support its clients, its public fell back on a simple conviction: we are stronger because we are morally superior.

Coming to power at the turn of the millennium, Mr Putin co-operated with America until 2003, the year that saw Mr Bush's invasion of Iraq and Georgia's Rose revolution. The next year Ukraine's Orange revolution got under way. Mr Putin believed that America had toppled the leaders of the two former Soviet republics; he had a strong aversion to seeing anything similar in Moscow. In 2011 he blamed Hillary Clinton, then America's secretary of state, for demonstrations against him, pushing relations to a new low.

For Mr Putin, the downside of Mr Trump's win is that it prevents him from invoking America as an enemy. This could be only a temporary setback: despite his disdain for NATO and liberal interventionism, Mr Trump may well lash out militarily somewhere, at which point anti-American propaganda can, if necessary, be cranked back up. For now, Mr Putin will be content that an American leader is at last paying him the respect he feels he deserves.

The irony is that any Russian who grew up before 1989 can see in Mr Trump the perfect Soviet caricature of a hateful American imperialist. Now, though, this same image lets the Kremlin's propagandists present him as an ally in the global fight between right-minded nationalists and decadent Western liberals, a battle that will continue in the upcoming elections in Germany and France. Russian television particularly relishes footage of demonstrations in America and Europe. They represent a thrilling new front in a civilisational struggle led by Mr Putin—and now joined by the president of the United States.