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STAFF DELEGATION

TRIP REPORT ON MOSCOW, GEORGIA, MOLDOVA AND BELARUS

JUNE 25 - JULY 4, 1992

A REPORT PREPARED BY THE STAFF
OF THE HELSINKI COMMISSION

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HELSINKI COMMISSION STAFF DELEGATION VISIT TO MOSCOW, GEORGIA, MOLDOVA AND BELARUS

From June 25 - July 4, a Helsinki Commission staff delegation consisting of Senior Advisor David M. Evans, Michael Ochs and John Finerty visited Moscow and three new CSCE member states: the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Moldova and Belarus. The delegation met with government officials, opposition, religious and national minority representatives, businessmen, journalists, academics and others. The trip was part of a Commission examination of CSCE implementation in new CSCE member states of the former Soviet Union, and completed a program of visits undertaken this year to each of these new states. These visits included a Commission delegation led by Co-Chairman DeConcini to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine in April 1992, and staff delegations to St. Petersburg and to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in May 1992. The delegation sought to explain the CSCE process, the work of the Commission and to discuss commitments undertaken within the CSCE. The delegation paid special attention to human rights issues and the process of democratization in the new states.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Each country visited by the delegation has its own particular problems, as they all cope with their newly acquired independence. Their implementation of CSCE commitments naturally reflects the political circumstances obtaining in the country at large.

Belarus exhibits little evidence of ethnic conflict (the situation of the Polish minority, while worrisome, is unlikely to become a state-threatening crisis) and Belarus has historic and ethnic reasons to cleave to Russia, despite the breakup of the USSR. As in Turkmenistan, Belarus's post-Soviet "stability" appears to mean relatively little organized political activity and the survival in power of the renamed Communist Party elite. On the other hand, such "stability" retards growth away from Soviet reality. By contrast, Georgia and Moldova are far more unstable. They share the unhappy reality of ethnic war, exacerbated in Georgia by a bitter rift between supporters of the current and former authorities. As states without Slavic majorities and with historic reasons to fear Russian domination, their efforts to create a non-Soviet personality and structure have been accompanied by major disruptions and bloodshed, while their relations with Russia -- an important factor in their hopes to achieve stability -- have been stormy.

Georgia is engulfed in bloody ethnic disputes (particularly in South Ossetia, where a multilateral peacekeeping force has restrained the violence, and Abkhazia) and a political conflict (between backers of ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze). Gamsakhurdia's removal by force last January is the key to Georgian politics today, as it determines the legitimacy -- or lack of legitimacy -- of the current government and the battle between adherents of the opposing sides. Whether stability can

be attained under such circumstances, even after the scheduled October parliamentary election, is unclear. Consequently, prospects are uncertain in Georgia for resolving ethnic tensions and establishing a law-based state which observes human rights and protects national minorities.

The chief concern in **Moldova** is the carnage of the civil war in Transdniestria. President Snegur and other officials emphasized their wish to find a just solution to the issue but were clearly concerned about the aggressive position of Russia, while two major political groups charged that the Snegur administration had gravely mishandled the crisis. Parliamentarians and government representatives outlined other areas in which Chisinau was attempting to reconcile various claims and interests of the ethnic Moldovan Romanophone majority with those of the many other ethnic groups in the country. The editor of the major Jewish newspaper in Chisinau reported a significant rise in Jewish cultural activities, but also detected signs of an increase in "day-to-day anti-Semitism." Evangelical Christian leaders reported that their churches were carrying on an extensive program of evangelization, despite what they considered a noticeable tilt in Moldovan "freedom of conscience" legislation toward the "national" Orthodox church.

In **Belarus**, democratization has made relatively little progress. The Belarusian Popular Front and its allies have secured enough petition signatures to force a referendum on establishing a new parliament, but the Front fears that the old-line majority in the parliament will delay holding the referendum until it can reinforce its grip on power. The press is entirely subsidized by the government, limiting the opposition's ability to get its message out. There are at least four "secrecy" refuseniks in Belarus, and although a new "exit and entry" law is being drafted, OVIR officials defended the present practice of detaining emigration applicants for up to five years on the basis of their access to "secrets." The leader of the Belarus Baptist community was enthusiastic about the new freedoms and opportunities enjoyed by the church, and praised Supreme Soviet Chairman Shushkevich for his positive attitude toward believers in Belarus. In contrast, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Minsk and Mogilev charged that Minsk was delaying the return of churches and church property to the church, apparently out of fear that the predominantly Polish-language church was part of a Polish irredentist movement in Western Belarus.

The Commission wishes to thank the Charges d'affaires/Ambassadors-designate and their staffs at the U.S. Embassies in Tbilisi, Chisinau and Minsk, as well as the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, for their excellent support and cooperation in assuring the success of the delegation's visit.

MOSCOW
June 25-26, 1992

Mark Entin

The delegation met with Mark Entin, the acting director of CSCE affairs in the Russian Foreign Ministry. Entin offered his views on a range of questions and events in the former USSR and the CSCE process.

Discussing the Helsinki Follow-up Meeting (then taking place), Entin said he expected important new documents to emerge from the negotiations. He also anticipated the further institutionalization of the Helsinki Process, which was becoming an international organization.

Turning to the CSCE talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Entin said that the Minsk Conference (to which Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed in March) would be long and difficult. He lamented the CSCE's failure thus far to come to a decision in Helsinki on a peacekeeping force or civilian observers to monitor the corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia through Lachin. Maybe it was time, concluded Entin, to consider United Nations involvement.

Armed violence had already broken out in Moldova before the delegation's arrival in Moscow. Entin described events in Moldova as "genocide," and accused the Moldovans of obvious violations of human rights. He said there was growing popular support in Russia for the 14th Army (stationed in Moldova) to crush the Moldovan attack on the city of Bendery, where hundreds reportedly had been killed in the last few days.

Entin also discussed at length the situation in the Baltic States, focusing first on human rights and then on the withdrawal of Russian/CIS troops. On the former, he said that Lithuania's laws on human rights were better than those of Latvia or Estonia. He even accused Estonia of refusing to permit Western experts on human rights to come and examine legislation passed in Tallinn [a charge that struck the delegation as quite odd]. Entin added that Scandinavian countries and "Human Watch" reports [by which he may have meant "Helsinki Watch"] were pressing the Balts to improve their human rights record.

As for the thorny issue of troop withdrawal, Entin took a surprisingly candid, categorical stance, rejecting any possibility of major withdrawals in the foreseeable future. Russian spokespersons have usually justified the failure to bring the forces home by citing a lack of housing for them. Entin, however, stressed Russia's "strategic" concerns, namely, the need to ensure the position of Russian troops still in Germany and Poland, whose

staged withdrawal would not be complete until 1994. He added that troop withdrawals from the Baltic States would complicate ongoing withdrawals from Ukraine and Belarus, and only then did he mention the threat to social stability that would be caused by the arrival of large numbers of armed soldiers in a Russia unprepared to care for them.

Entin said, however, that Russia understands the Balts' concerns about the presence of Russian troops. He offered the assurances that the forces are incapable of offensive action and are only guarding tanks, planes, ammunition, and other military equipment. He denied that they were dangerous or in any way threatened the Baltic States. Entin warned that third-party involvement in the issue of Russian troops in the Baltic States, such as by the U.S. Congress or the CSCE, could only "destabilize" the situation.

Finally, Entin responded to a question about the implications of a June 7 interview by Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev, who discussed future possible border changes based on referendums in Russian-populated regions outside Russia. Entin said Russia has no territorial claims on anyone, although several states have claims on Russia. He added that nothing Kozyrev said contradicted CSCE principles or any other international documents, as Russia's Foreign Minister was speaking exclusively of *peaceful* border changes.

Sergei Kovalev, Teimouraz Ramishvili, Ernest Ametisov

The delegation met at a working lunch with Sergei Kovalev, Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet Committee on Human Rights, Teimouraz Ramishvili, Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of International Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights, and Ernest Ametisov, member of the Russian Constitutional Court.

Much of the discussion centered on ethnic tension and clashes in Russia and neighboring states, and the possible role of CSCE in resolving these conflicts. The delegation also raised the issue of "economic prisoners" in Russia. Kovalev noted that there were still tens of thousands -- perhaps as many as a hundred thousand -- such prisoners. An amnesty had been promulgated for some prisoners serving short terms (i.e., not specifically addressed to the nature of the charges, but to the length of the sentences) and this included some "economic prisoners," but there were many more serving long terms. Probably the greatest obstacle to a general amnesty for "economic prisoners," said Kovalev, was the presence in the Russian legislature of many former police officials who were loath to release such -- to their mind -- "criminals."

The delegation again raised the long-standing refusenik case of Vasily Barats. Kovalev noted that Barats had not been in contact with the "Secrecy Commission" [established in the fall of 1991 to deal with refuseniks denied permission to emigrate on secrecy grounds, then suspended by the Yeltsin administration as a Gorbachev creation

and not yet reconstituted], which made it somewhat more difficult to secure his file. However, given the extraordinary nature of the case, Kovalev suggested that when the "Secrecy Commission" is reconstituted, it may be necessary simply to "demand his file" and press the authorities to drop the secrecy objections. [Barats, a former Soviet Army officer, first applied to emigrate in 1977. His wife was allowed to emigrate to Canada in 1990.]

Irina Berman

A member of the delegation visited with Irina Berman, head of the Russian-American Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law. The discussion focused on the recent conviction of Mark Glizer, a Moscow resident convicted in June 1992 for allegedly arranging the sale of a privately owned automobile. In Berman's opinion, the trial was a travesty, with the testimony of at least one prosecution witness so befuddled that even the prosecutor questioned his reliability. She felt strongly that an order for conviction must have come "from above." Prior to his trial and conviction, Glizer was reportedly subjected to anti-Semitic threats from the police investigator handling the case. [The Glizer case is another "economic case" that theoretically should not occur in post-Soviet Russia -- both in light of President Yeltsin's decree removing the "speculation" article from the Russian Criminal Code, and the CSCE *Bonn Economic Conference* communique endorsing free and competitive market economies in participating states.]

GEORGIA
June 26-30, 1992

The Commission delegation arrived in Georgia, a particularly unstable country, at a particularly tense moment: several days before, backers of ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia had tried to take over the television station and rally supporters to bring Gamsakhurdia back to power. Though the effort failed, and the authorities claim to have the situation under control, the atmosphere in Tbilisi was -- and is -- tense. Officials routinely carry guns in their belts, and groups of gun-toting young men stop and search cars. The drivers of cars in which the delegation traveled had automatic weapons handy, and the capital feels like a town waiting for the next explosion. A midnight-to-dawn curfew is in effect, and the sound of gunfire can be heard at night.

At the apex of the current structure of government is the State Council, which took over in March 1992 from the Military Council that emerged following the ouster of Gamsakhurdia in January. Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia's former Communist Party leader and former Soviet Foreign Minister, is the chairman of the Council, which now has over 80 members, and is still growing.

Alexander Kavsadze

The delegation met first with Alexander Kavsadze, chairman of the State Council's committee on human rights and inter-ethnic relations. Kavsadze, a deputy in the former Supreme Council (parliament), said Gamsakhurdia was a dictator. He claimed that after Gamsakhurdia's ouster, prisoners of conscience (POCs) had been freed, all publications had been liberated from government supervision, and the same would soon be done with television.

Kavsadze said the State Council included representatives of all political parties, creative and social organizations, and all nationalities. He said his committee had been created deliberately within the State Council to act as a watchdog on the government. He himself -- a deputy prime minister -- had been appointed as chairman to raise the committee's prestige.

About 33 percent of Georgia's population is non-Georgian. On inter-ethnic conflict, Kavsadze reported that a council of experts on different non-Georgian nationalities had been created in an effort to solve all problems by peaceful means. Turning to the crisis in South Ossetia, Kavsadze conceded that the new authorities had been unable to stop the conflict, and affirmed that Georgia would not let South Ossetia -- which Georgians call "Samachablo" -- secede. The authorities' main goal at present is arranging a ceasefire, for which purpose a special government commission had been established to deal with the entire South Ossetian issue.

Asked about the present government's legality, Kavsadze denied that Gamsakhurdia's ouster had been a coup d'etat. He characterized the December 1991-January 1992 events as the uprising of a humiliated people, who were "lucky that armed groups and individuals arose among them."

On the possibility of Gamsakhurdia's participation in the parliamentary election planned for this October, Kavsadze said all parties, including pro-Gamsakhurdia parties, would be able to take part but that Gamsakhurdia probably would not: he was guilty of criminal acts and had abused the presidency. Kavsadze promised that international observers would be invited to monitor the election.

In conclusion, Kavsadze acknowledged that his committee had done very little so far to defend human rights. The situation in Georgia was too complex and difficult, he said. But he denied that Georgia now has any POCs and he promised that legal reforms would continue.

[Illustrative of the instability in today's Georgia is that Kavsadze was reportedly abducted in early July while traveling in the western part of the country.]

Patriarch Ilya

Most of the delegation's conversation with the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church centered on the political situation in Georgia. The Patriarch stated that the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast never existed in Georgia before it was created by the Bolsheviks in 1921, and he described the conflict in South Ossetia as "artificial," by which he apparently meant that it was stirred up by outside [Russian] forces.

On Georgia's leading politicians, the Patriarch said that Gamsakhurdia's regime had been very difficult, and had tried to inculcate totalitarianism. He agreed that Gamsakhurdia had been deposed by force but countered that there had been no other choice, as his rule had been strengthening totalitarianism and isolation. The Patriarch said Gamsakhurdia's power base was the lower strata; he had rejected any ties with the intelligentsia, which "played a special role" in his overthrow. Patriarch Ilya said Gamsakhurdia also tried to exploit the church, which, he maintained, must be separate from the state. By contrast, the Patriarch praised Eduard Shevardnadze [even though he reported that Shevardnadze, too, had proposed that the church be part of the government].

Patriarch Ilya also discussed the situation of non-Orthodox religions in Georgia. He said the Jews and Catholics enjoyed long-established, good relations with the Orthodox. The Baptists were a newer phenomenon in Georgia; while he said they did not suffer any discrimination, he argued that no proselytism should take place.

Tengiz Sigua

Gamsakhurdia's Prime Minister until August 1991, and the current "Prime Minister" of the State Council [no actual government is in place at present], Sigua accused Gamsakhurdia of not delivering on his promises of political and economic reform. Pointing to changes since Gamskhurdia's ouster, Sigua claimed the previously government-controlled press had been freed in January. He stressed Georgia's current economic difficulties, adding that economic reform had been launched, with almost 60 percent of land already distributed free of charge to the peasants. Housing had also been distributed free of charge and the privatization of trade and light industry was soon to begin. Sigua added that Georgia's economic recovery was unimaginable without Western investment, and he pointed to Georgia's membership in the IMF, World Bank and EBRD. The IMF will counsel Georgia in proceeding with its new currency, which Sigua hoped would begin circulating in the fall.

Sigua said that Georgia would not join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). But as an instance of Georgia's desire for regional cooperation, he observed that Georgia had joined the Black Sea Cooperation Initiative, along with other Transcausian states, Turkey, Romania and other Black Sea states.

On South Ossetia, Sigua said that Russian President Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze had signed an agreement several days before and he believed there was reason to hope the conflict would be solved by political means. The first priority, he maintained, was separating the combatants.

As for the upcoming parliamentary election, Sigua said that the Ministry of Justice had registered over 30 political parties which would be participating. He added that Gamsakhurdia not only could run for office, as he had been indicted but not yet sentenced, but that he should, indeed, run.

Conversations with Non-Georgians

In the course of a four-day stay in Tbilisi, the delegation met with representatives of various non-Georgian nationalities. The picture they painted of their status and opportunities in Georgia varied. A spokesman of Georgia's Jewish community, a writer who is also a member of the State Council, said that Georgia's Jews had no complaints. Two newspaper editors representing, respectively, the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, basically echoed this assessment, though they criticized a recent decree banning privatization in a 21-kilometer swath along the border with neighboring states as affecting Armenians and Azeris in those regions. Interestingly, these two individuals reported no tension between the Armenian and Azeri communities in Georgia, and seemed to be quite good friends, as well as colleagues.

Those Ossetians, however, with whom the delegation met had many grievances. Members of *Vsmaron* [Brotherhood], the only Ossetian organization in Tbilisi, complained that there are no Ossetians in the State Council, even though *Vsmaron* is registered. They also protested that the chairman of an official commission on Georgian-Ossetian relations -- Nodar Notadze, the chairman of the Popular Front -- is notorious for his anti-Ossetian sentiments and statements. Most serious was their charge that the chairman of *Vsmaron* was kidnapped in March and has not been heard from since.

Another Ossetian present complained about having been harassed, dismissed from his job and arrested under false pretenses. He alleged that he could not regain his old job, despite having been subsequently acquitted of all charges against him. The Ossetian spokespersons claimed that this individual's personal saga was representative of all Ossetians in Georgia, adding that Ossetians will be effectively deprived of any benefits or opportunities of privatization.

The spokesman of the Abkhaz community was also rather pessimistic, given growing political and inter-ethnic tensions in Abkhazia. He said that Abkhazia probably would not participate in the October parliamentary election.

Pro-Gamsakhurdia Opposition

The delegation sought out supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The meeting took place in rather conspiratorial circumstances, and was reminiscent of meetings with Soviet dissidents before 1985. Gamsakhurdia's backers told of massive repression and discrimination, including beatings, arrests and even murder.

The professedly non-partisan editor of a newspaper which publishes letters from readers reported that the authorities had ordered his newspaper closed on June 24, after Prime Minister Sigua and the Procurator General had tried to link him to the attack on the television station. He charged further that the police had destroyed the facilities where his newspaper was being printed and confiscated an entire issue. Another editor, of an openly pro-Gamsakhurdia newspaper, also reported that the authorities were making it impossible to publish. These editors rejected claims by Sigua and other government officials that newspapers were free and independent, charging that 40 million rubles had been allocated for certain newspapers -- some of which were edited by members of the State Council.

The pro-Gamsakhurdia spokespersons also charged that Georgia's current authorities had arrested former Supreme Council deputies. They claimed further that law enforcement officials had come to private residences looking for individuals to arrest and when they failed to find them, arrested their family members. Other accusations against the authorities included the violent dispersal of pro-Gamsakhurdia demonstrations and meetings, at which bullets and dogs were used against participants.

A leading figure of the pro-Gamsakhurdia resistance told the delegation that his movement refuses to recognize the legality and legitimacy of the current government. The movement, established in April 1992, he said, aims at restoring Gamsakhurdia to power by exclusively peaceful means, and claims hundreds of thousands of supporters.

The most stunning accusation was made by an individual who claimed that his son had refused to sign a document asserting that torture and atrocities had been carried out in the parliament building where Gamsakhurdia had been holed up in December-January; his son was subsequently found hung.

Questioned by the delegation about these charges, Georgian officials denied that deputies had been beaten. They claimed that a deputy seen on television with a bruised face had, in fact, been battered by the crowd, furious at his participation in the attempt to take the television tower. In general, these official spokespersons acknowledged that individual acts of brutality might have occurred in Georgia's tense political situation, but they denied that such orders could have come from the top. They specifically discounted the possibility that Shevardnadze could have issued any such orders, although they refused to vouch for State Council members Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Kitovani [the leader of the

paramilitary group *Mkhedrioni* and the Minister of Defense, respectively] and they conceded that miscarriages of justice probably took place on local levels.

These officials, who included a State Council member, also praised Shevardnadze for his lonely support for their initiative on a law defending repressed peoples. In Georgia, such victims of Stalinism include Meskhetian Turks, Germans, Greeks and others.

The Law for the October 1992 Parliamentary Election

Officials working on the October parliamentary election explained to the delegation that most of the work on the regulations was done by "Democratic Choice for Georgia," a grouping of social-political organizations and parties. On the basis of this work -- from which, they claimed, no parties, including pro-Gamsakhurdia parties, had been barred -- a draft law had been published in January and the State Council subsequently created a special commission to develop the draft.

Whereas the October 1990 Supreme Soviet election law created a 250-seat legislature chosen equally by majoritarian and proportional systems, the October 1992 election features a preferential system: if a voter's first choice fails to be elected, his ballot goes to his second (or third) choice. Explaining their selection of this system, the officials said that they could not afford to lose even one voter's voice. Moreover, in the absence of a stable party system -- despite a new law on political parties, which had not yet been passed in 1990 -- they wanted legislators to be individuals, and to avoid a monopoly role in parliament for one party.

The officials reported that a new Central Election Commission (CEC) has been formed, with the State Council having already appointed its chairman and three other members. Registered political parties will be able to have a representative on the CEC, as well as in district and local election commissions, to keep an eye on each other during the balloting and vote count.

As for involvement by pro-Gamsakhurdia parties in the political process, the officials said that such groups had been invited to participate in the initial drafting and all political organizations in Georgia had been invited to comment on the draft law after its publication. They said that three groups have been registered that had been part of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Round Table coalition; they have their representative on the CEC and they are expected to take part in the election.

The new election regulations eliminate any requirement for a minimum turnout, i.e., 50 percent of the eligible electorate, for the election to be valid. Gamsakhurdia backers had complained about this to the delegation, arguing that it proved the current authorities fear a broad-based boycott that would demonstrate their illegitimacy. The election officials

acknowledged this concern, but said that if a legislature could be produced that reflected 40 percent of the electorate, it would be more representative than the current State Council and, hence, an advance. On the other hand, they argued, if over half of eligible voters do take part, the argument of Gamsakhurdia's supporters would lose its cogency.

Vakhtang Razmadze

The delegation discussed with Attorney General Razmadze Georgia's constitution and specific allegations of human rights violations made by local sources. Razmadze explained that Georgia's Soviet-era constitution is still in effect until a new one is adopted. He added that Georgia has no "economic" prisoners: "we have enough violent criminals to deal with." As for the grievances expressed to the delegation, Razmadze defended the treatment of the Ossetian described above who had lost his job and apartment, saying that he has his apartment, that a job (but not necessarily his old one) would be found for him if he wants, and that Razmadze's office had quashed attempts by a regional district attorney to reopen the charges already dropped against the Ossetian.

Razmadze adamantly rejected accusations made by Gamsakhurdia supporters that deputies had been arrested for supporting the ousted president. He argued that they had actually been jailed for criminal acts. As for the allegations made by one of the newspaper editors, Razmadze said that individuals might be charged with treason for calling for the armed overthrow of the government. [In fact, the delegation subsequently learned that no such charges were brought; instead, the editor was fined 200 rubles. According to the most recent available information, his newspaper is not legally barred from publishing, but the editor claims he cannot produce a newspaper because of the damage done to the facilities by the police.]

Eduard Shevardnadze

Shevardnadze addressed a wide range of issues in his 90-minute conversation with the delegation. Following are the highlights:

CSCE: Shevardnadze said that CSCE in its present form had not been very effective in dealing with conflicts ["I live in a conflict zone"]. He argued that the CSCE process should aim at stimulating regional cooperation, as in the Black Sea Cooperation Initiative, which groups Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and other states along the Black Sea. Shevardnadze said regional groupings of CSCE states offered better prospects for effective regulation of disputes. He has called for a ceasefire and a moratorium on all ethnic conflicts for a period of perhaps five years, during which no new claims would be presented. If a ceasefire holds, then safety corridors could be established. Shevardnadze

urged deferral of discussions about the juridical status of disputed regions, which would make it impossible to reach an accord.

South Ossetia: Shevardnadze said that the right to self-determination enshrined in CSCE documents underlay the desire of Ossetians in South Ossetia to unite with North Ossetia (across the border with Russia). He argued that this right should be understood to mean self-determination within the borders of an existing state, and that while the rights of national minorities had to be respected, members of such minorities also have responsibilities. Shevardnadze argued that small peoples can often be a source of instability, whereas more populous nations can be more tolerant. He concluded that the problem in South Ossetia could be solved if there is no external, i.e., Russian, interference.

Relations with Russia: Responding to a question about Russian Foreign Minister's Kozyrev's call in June for creating a special status for Russian-populated areas of former Soviet republics, and possible future border changes based on referendums, Shevardnadze said such a policy "would lead to a big war." He added that such statements by high-level Russian officials had inflamed Georgian anger against Russian troops stationed in Georgia, with Georgians now demanding that resident Russians defend Georgia.

Asked to explain the differences between statements by Russian President Yeltsin and other Russian politicians, Shevardnadze replied they reflected real divergences of views. Yeltsin, he said, must address the concerns of the nationalist camp, but Shevardnadze criticized Yeltsin's actions in Moldova.

Georgian Politics: Shevardnadze conceded that most people in Georgia favored a parliamentary system of government, but he argued for a presidential system, saying that only a strong executive power could cope with Georgia's problems. He said it was difficult to reach decisions in the State Council, whose members lack experience. Asked whether he would run in October, Shevardnadze replied he had no desire to do so, "but there is no alternative."

On the election, Shevardnadze said the Procurator General is thinking of banning two parties -- "small, Nazi-like parties" -- but that parties loyal to Zviad Gamsakhurdia would take part in the voting.

Shevardnadze denied that the human rights of Gamsakhurdia's supporters were being violated. He claimed that there were backers of Gamsakhurdia in the State Council apparatus and in Georgia's "small army." As for the Supreme Council deputies who had been imprisoned, he asserted they had been jailed for embezzlement. Asked about the rights of demonstrators, Shevardnadze said new rules on demonstrations were being elaborated that would permit demonstrations in certain areas but not on main thoroughfares.

MOLDOVA
June 30-July 2, 1992

Unlike Georgia, where there had been a sense of political uncertainty from the very beginning of the Soviet breakup, Moldova had seemed calm, despite a serious conflict brewing under the surface. This conflict, the secessionist movement in Moldova's Transdniestria area, broke out into violence in November 1990 and had escalated to the level of raging war around the city of Bendery in the days just before the delegation's arrival.

Moldova's tragedy was dramatically symbolized upon the delegation's arrival in Chisinau, when a member of the Air Moldova flight crew disembarked from the plane and was informed that his brother had just been killed in the fighting around Bendery.

President Mircea Snegur, former Communist Party Secretary for Agriculture, was overwhelmingly elected without formal challenge on December 8, 1992 (see Commission report, *Report on the Moldova Presidential Election*, December 21, 1992). The dominant faction of the 355-member parliament is the so-called "Agriculture Bloc" composed primarily of old-line collective farm officials and their factory director allies. In opposition to the "Agricultural Bloc" is the anti-communist "Christian Democratic Popular Front," committed to early reunification with Romania. Although the initial leader in the struggle against Moscow in 1989-90, the "Popular Front" (now the Christian Democratic Popular Front) lost considerable membership and influence in parliament as a result of its perceived excessive nationalism. Between these two factions are dozens of generally moderate anti-communist deputies opposed to immediate reunification with Romania and seeking a *modus operandi* with the various political and ethnic forces in Moldova. The "Agreement" and "Independent" caucuses are composed mostly of former Party members and "Interfront" members. The Social Democrats have four deputies. Sixty-four deputies were elected from the left bank Transdniestria region, but as a result of the civil war, they have rarely attended sessions. In early June, thirty-seven left bank deputies arrived in Chisinau in an effort to help resolve the crisis. Subsequently, approximately two dozen deputies from the Bendery area resigned in protest against the events there in late June.

While the delegation was in Chisinau, the Moldovan parliament approved the nomination of Alexandr Sangheli, former Minister of Agriculture, as Prime Minister. Sangheli replaced Valeriu Muravschi, who had resigned a few weeks earlier.

Yuri Roshka, Christian Democratic Popular Front

The delegation met first with Yuri Roshka, President of the Executive Council of the Christian Democratic Popular Front (CDPF -- formerly the Popular Front). Roshka reported that at least five members of the CDPF on the left bank had been arrested by Tiraspol authorities and some reportedly beaten. At least two others had disappeared without word of their whereabouts.

Previously, the pro-reunification CDPF had opposed recognition of Moldova as a separate political entity, but Roshka noted that he "accepted the existence" of Moldova at present. The majority of Moldovans do not presently favor reunification, he admitted, but added "the majority didn't want the demise of the Soviet Union" either.

Roshka saw the conflict in Transdniestria as evidence of Russian expansionism and doubted that the 14th Army was operating autonomously. While the Ukrainian government appeared to be moving toward Moscow's position on the left bank, by calling for autonomy for Transdniestria, the CDPF planned to meet with the Ukrainian Christian Democratic Party to discuss resolution of the issue. Roshka was pessimistic about the ability of the administration of Snegur -- "Homo Soveticus," in his words -- to resolve the conflict favorably for Moldova.

President Snegur and Foreign Minister Tiu

President Snegur announced that a ceasefire had been arranged for that evening and that he intended to meet with President Yeltsin in Moscow shortly. [Since that time, a tenuous "peacekeeping plan" has been worked out between Chisinau, Moscow and Tiraspol, which includes elements of the 14th Army serving as "peacekeepers."] He expressed gratitude for the supportive statements made by the U.S. government in the wake of the clash around Bendery affirming Moldova's territorial integrity and cautioning against any armed intervention.

Snegur admitted that the Transdniestria issue might have been handled better by Chisinau: "We just said no autonomy, no secession, no special status." Now, despite the fact that international law is on Moldova's side, it may be necessary to "give up certain ambitions" because "life is life." Specifically, he acknowledged the possibility of granting to the left bank a "special status" in case of a "change in status" of Moldova. [Snegur does not use the term "reunification" per se, but "change of status" implying a negotiated return by Chisinau rather than simple reintegration as Bucharest's Bessarabian province. This has since been clarified as including a referendum by the left bank on its future, should Moldova "change its status"/reunify.]

As for who was in control on the left bank, Snegur felt that while some forces were under the control of the Russian Army and others under the Tiraspol government, still others appeared to be operating on their own.

Women's Refugee Committee, Ludmila Scalnaya, Chairwoman

The delegation met briefly with representatives of Moldovan refugees who had fled, or had been driven, across the Dniestr River to escape the fighting. Participants described persecution and orders from local officials to teach Russian instead of Moldovan in local schools. The delegation was provided with material and photographs depicting atrocities against Moldovan-ethnic citizens. [Among the material was an appeal on behalf of 25,000 refugees; the latest figures are around 43,000.]

Vasile Nedelchuk, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations;
Alexandr Arsenii, Chairman, Committee on Human Rights and National Relations, Moldovan Parliament

Nedelchuk and Arsenii further addressed the Transdniestria situation, emphasizing the government's desire for a peaceful solution and the superior firepower that Chisinau faced. Nedelchuk referred to the International Helsinki Federation and CSCE rapporteur missions that had reported favorably on the human rights situation in Moldova, and in this respect contrasted the right bank with the left bank, where, he said, the Tiraspol government has basically reinstituted the Soviet system and availed itself of the 14th Army to maintain itself in power. "The issue is not ethnic," he said, "it is ideological."

Touching on other major ethnic issues in Moldova, Nedelchuk noted that agreement had been reached with some Gagauz leaders to create a separate province for the Gagauz minority (and the Bulgarian community) within Moldova and that the speaker of the parliament, Alexander Moshanu, had sought Turkish assistance in providing educational and cultural materials for the Gagauz. However, he noted, segments of the Gagauz population are allied with Tiraspol, and a separatist Gagauz movement with its own minister of defense and militia has staged gun battles with Moldovan security forces. Nedelchuk also hoped that a treaty could be signed with Ukraine to guarantee civil rights to the respective minorities of each state.

Arsenii returned to the Transdniestria conflict, and re-emphasized Chisinau's interest in a peaceful solution. Moldova would be prepared, for example, to grant amnesty for most of the Transdniestria combatants, offer employment in the Moldovan military for some of the ex-Soviet officers, and arrange exchanges of Moldovan officers (and their housing) serving in the CIS for Russian officers serving in Moldova. He also pointed out

Moldova's "zero-variant" citizenship law that accepted as citizens all residents as of June 23, 1990, when Moldova declared its sovereignty.

Alexandr Brodsky, editor of "Our Voice" (Nash Golos)

The editor of the major Jewish newspaper in Chisinau described major advances for the Jewish community (e.g., Jewish newspapers, schools, a museum established in Chisinau, a synagogue opened in Tiraspol) and the President's decree on support for developing Jewish culture. He said that "superficially, everything is OK." However, anti-Semitic sentiments "on the street" seemed to be on the increase, even in one case appearing in the government newspaper *Sfatul Tserii*. The crisis in Transdniestria, he claimed, had provoked a rise of "national Bolshevism" along Moldovan/Romanian national lines and a regrettable longing for the strong arm of former Romanian Iron Guard leader Ion Antonescu. A small political party had even proposed a contest for the best statue of Antonescu. Brodsky had recently resigned from the Moldovan Union of Writers in protest against publication in the Union organ "Literature and Art" of an apology for Antonescu.

Brodsky said that there were still at least three Jewish refuseniks in Moldova. *Nash Golos* had just carried an article about these individuals, who were apparently victims of bureaucratic malfeasance at OVIR, the Ministry of Interior office responsible for issuing exit visas. When these refusenik cases were brought to the attention of a Moldovan parliamentarian, he immediately took down the names and addresses listed in *Nash Golos* and promised to address a formal inquiry to the Minister of Interior on these cases.

Brodsky reported that some refuseniks had been subjected to the practice of "displacement": when local residents learn that a Jewish family is leaving, they break the lock on the apartment while the residents are out and simply move in; when the family returns and protests, the answer is "you're leaving anyway....go move in with your relatives." The police, if they are called, generally do not interfere -- after all, the Jews are leaving, and the police have to live with these people, Brodsky concluded.

Viktor Pushkas, Deputy Chairman of Parliament
Petru Munteanu, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of Parliament

Pushkas gave the delegation a readout of the military, social, and economic situation on the left bank, imputing to the Dniestr Republic leadership a *Brest Fortress* (the celebrated Soviet version of the Alamo, where Red Army and NKVD troops held out for a week in 1941 against the Nazi invaders after the main body of the Red Army had retreated) mentality -- "our people have left, but we're still holding on." He said the September 1990 declaration of independence of the Dniestr Republic had been passed by

a tiny faction (60 deputies at all legislative levels) of pro-communist legislators without consideration of public opinion.

Pushkas then outlined the 13-point peace plan that had been agreed upon by right bank and left bank legislators -- meeting as the Commission to Establish National Accord -- on the eve of the Bendery clash. The renewed bloodshed had negated the entire process. [The Commission subsequently spoke with an *Express-Chronicle* correspondent who had interviewed residents and Dniester Republic officials in Tiraspol, as well as members of the Dniestr Guard in the Dubossary region, while the peace plan was being formulated. All of them categorically rejected the peace proposal, an indication that it may have faced rough sledding in any event.]

Pushkas closed by affirming his government's desire to protect the Moldovan/Romanian language as the state language, while retaining Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication, and establishing schools with an ethnic-specific language of instruction in areas of clear non-Moldovan (e.g., Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian) composition.

Munteanu emphasized the economic and personal damage being caused to Moldova on both sides of the Dniestr, and claimed that Moscow had limited the supply of rubles in an attempt to pressure Chisinau. Tiraspol, in control of most of Moldova's energy production, had cut off the flow of gas to the left bank, and much of the electric power. Like many of his colleagues, Munteanu also admitted that Chisinau had perhaps made mistakes in handling the Dniestr conflict, but he argued that this was not a justification for the bloodshed and destruction.

Viktor Grebenshchikov, General Director, Moldovan government Office of Nationality Issues
Stepan Bozbei, First Deputy to the General Director, Office of Nationality Affairs

The delegation discussed with Grebenshchikov and Bozbei Russophone charges that the language law was discriminatory. Grebenshchikov defended the bi-lingual stipulation of the law for government administrators, given that the majority of Moldovans are Romanophone, and emphasized that the law only applies to state functionaries: "If McDonald's comes to Chisinau and wants to hire a manager who only speaks Russian, they can." [Conversely, it should be pointed out that in post-Soviet Moldova there is precious little activity, e.g., commercial, educational, personal services, that falls within the private sphere.]

Asked about the position of Ukrainians in Moldova, Grebenshchikov asserted that during the Soviet period Ukrainians had been Russified and thought of themselves as

being Soviets, but that they had recently staked out a more independent position culturally and politically.

The delegation raised the allegations of anti-Semitism, particularly with respect to a newspaper article that had appeared in which certain professors with Slavic and Jewish-sounding surnames had been accused of "ingratitude" toward Moldova for having proposed the establishment of a "Russian institute." Grebenschikov maintained that this was in reaction to the fact that all upper-level instruction in Moldova had been in Russian, which continued to be the case in several institutions. However, he did grant that the polemics could and should be conducted without anti-Semitic or anti-Slavic overtones.

Mikhai Plasiciuc, ethnic Ukrainian Deputy, Moldovan Parliament

The delegation discussed with Ukrainian Deputy Plasiciuc the status of Ukrainians in Moldova, and especially on the left bank, in the light of an apparent change in Kiev's position on the Transdniestria conflict. Ukrainian President Kravchuk had recently advocated the concept of autonomy for Transdniestria. Previously, the Ukrainian government had avoided any endorsement of Tiraspol's separatist moves, in view of the latter's alignment with forces in Moscow clearly hostile to Ukrainian independence.

Plasiciuc maintained that the Kravchuk statement was probably a response, if not especially well thought out, to Ukraine's increased, if unwilling, involvement in the widening conflict: e.g., floods of refugees around Odessa, Cossacks crossing Ukrainian territory to defend Tiraspol, Ukrainian volunteers fighting in the Dniestr Guard. The position of Ukrainians on the left bank is not unanimous, he stated. Some, especially the old-line Russified officials, have indeed signed on with Tiraspol; others prefer Chisinau; others would like to see the left bank annexed to Ukraine. The upshot of the Kravchuk statement, Plasiciuc added, is that, whatever the intentions, it serves Moscow's interests and not Ukraine's.

Again, Plasiciuc noted that Chisinau had earlier missed opportunities while the conflict was germinating, and left bank Moldova was being subjected to "geopolitical propaganda" from the Old Guard. "We let the other side take the initiative, didn't try to get our side of the story across." When left bank deputies left the parliament last year (some claiming to have been physically assaulted by Moldovan nationalists in Chisinau), "we didn't try to get them back." In any event, Plasiciuc noted, the 600,000 Ukrainians on both sides of the Dniestr generally oppose re-unification with Romania, and the left bank and Russian nationalists have used pro-reunification rhetoric in an attempt to drive a wedge between Ukrainians and Moldovans.

Social Democrats: Oazu Nantoi, Viorel Chiubotaru, Deputy (FNU) Staru

The delegation visited with members of the Social Democratic Party, who strongly criticized both Moscow's provocative behavior vis-a-vis the Transdniestria crisis, and the Snegur administration's handling of the situation.

Nantoi did "not exclude" the possibility that Yeltsin was using the Transdniestria conflict and a hard-line Moscow position to ingratiate himself with Russian nationalists. Moreover, he said, if Moscow wins this power play, it will probably lead to similar Russian-area secession moves and the re-establishment of the Soviet Empire. Interestingly, Nantoi foresaw disaster if the 14th Army left Transdniestria precipitously, since, if properly controlled, it is the only force capable of maintaining peace, given the arms flow to the area and the level of tensions.

The Social Democrats were also unsparing in their criticism of Snegur, who, they claimed, needed the Transdniestria conflict to deflect criticism of economic failures caused they claimed, by his unwillingness to divest his administration of incompetent Party apparatchiks. Under pressure from the Popular Front-controlled media, they asserted, Snegur had allowed himself to be maneuvered into taking an unnecessarily hard line on the left bank where a conciliatory approach was called for.

Nantoi suggested that frustration on the part of Moldovan military and security forces fighting against the Russians might cause them to turn against the Chisinau administration if they feel inadequately supported or begin to doubt the wisdom of defending an administration permeated with former Communist Party officials.

Religious Leaders

The delegation hosted a dinner for leaders of the Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Baptist religious communities. The representative of the Orthodox Church was unable to attend.

All of the invitees noted the new freedoms for religious practice in independent Moldova, while mentioning the standard economic difficulties inherent in re-establishing a viable organizational infrastructure. The delegation was surprised to hear that under Moldovan legislation, proselytizing was illegal, although the law does not appear to be enforced.

BELARUS
July 2-4, 1992

Of the independent states that arose from the ashes of the Soviet Union, Belarus has been one of the most tranquil. It is also one of the most conservative in terms of political and economic developments. Of the 360-person Belarusian parliament, around 35 deputies are members of the reform-oriented Popular Front, with perhaps another 65-70 sympathizers. The atmosphere in Minsk, the capital, is also very conservative, without the "dollar economy" of the streets, and the West European and American influences present in other CIS and Baltic States.

For all the conservative appearance, however, the Popular Front and other allied political groups have managed to collect enough signatures -- over 450,000 -- on petitions to force the government to hold a referendum on holding new elections to parliament. The date of the referendum has been delayed by the parliament until at least the fall. Complicating the referendum discussions is the fact that the parliament is working on a draft of a new Belarusian constitution. The pro-referendum opposition suspects that the parliament will maneuver the constitution wording to produce an election statute that will either negate the need for a referendum or dilute its effect, thus leaving in power the anti-reform majority.

OVIR Representatives

The OVIR representatives provided the [now familiar] readout of the number of persons who had left the country, and stated that the Cabinet of Minister and specialists were preparing a new Law on Entry and Exit to replace the old Union law.

The delegation raised the case of a known "secrecy" refusenik, Yan Belyavsky (previously confirmed with the U.S. Embassy in Minsk). The OVIR officials defended his detention on the grounds that his factory would not certify that his knowledge had "lost its importance" and claimed that according to the law, they were powerless to change the decision. Besides Belyavsky, there were three other "secrecy" cases, according to OVIR. The secrecy classification applies for five years, claimed an OVIR representative, and it was based on "international standards." When the delegation asked specifically which "international standards," the response was a vague reference to German or French regulations. Under the five-year limitation, Belyavsky is not entitled to leave until 1994; however, an appeal to the Chairman of the parliament may be effective, they suggested.

With regard to possible "poor relatives" refusal cases, the OVIR officials stated that they had no statistics and little knowledge of such cases, since they only see the emigration applications after all the preliminary paperwork has been collected, and the "poor relatives" situation pertains to applicants whose relatives will not sign the necessary paperwork.

Pastor Ivan Bykati, President of the Union of Evangelical-Christians and Baptists of Belarus

Pastor Bykati was enthusiastic about the changes that had taken place for Baptists in Belarus; he thanked the Lord for the new policies and praised Chairman of the parliament Shushkevich for his positive attitude and assistance to the church. The Pastor showed the delegation a message of Easter greetings from Shushkevich. It was "the best period for Evangelicals," he said, with no limitations on evangelical and charitable activities. The church had received permission from local planning authorities to build a church and seminary complex in Minsk, and the only holdup was financial. The delegation then visited a nearby Baptist church being refurbished by the members.

Vladimir Zablotsky, Deputy Chairman, Belarusian Popular Front

The delegation met with Popular Front spokesman Zablotsky and several members of the Science and Technology Committee of the Belarusian parliament at the parliament building.

According to Zablotsky, the Popular Front seeks a "gradual, measured change of power" to bring economic and political reform to the country. However, the old guard controls most of the levers of power and is loath to give them up. In theory, the referendum on a new parliament could have been held already, but the parliament had delayed it at least until September. Moreover, if the parliament adopts the new Belarus constitution (see above), it is unlikely there will be a referendum.

In terms of economics, Belarus lacks a legal basis for a market economy. There have been some half-measures, such as a government proposal for tax breaks for small businesses, but no deep shifts toward the market or genuine price reforms. Zablotsky envisaged close economic ties with Russia on a mutually-advantageous basis, but pointed out that at present the Russian military-industrial complex drives the Belarus economy.

Asked about freedom of the press, Zablotsky stated that there had been some independent newspapers, but that they had been driven out of business by the high cost of production. Now, all newspapers are subsidized by the government, which limits their independence and makes it difficult for the Popular Front to get its message out. Some deputies and other interested individuals were attempting to put together a newspaper without government financing, he reported.

Archbishop Swiatek, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Minsk and Mogilev

Archbishop Swiatek's description of the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus differed considerably from that of the Baptists. According to the Archbishop,

the Catholic Church faces hostility from anti-religious officials ("communism is dead, but the communists are still around") and Belarusian nationalists fearful of Polish influence. Belarusian authorities appear to suspect the Church and its primarily Polish-speaking parishioners in Western Belarus -- especially in Grodno Oblast -- as a Polish "fifth column" working to restore Poland's pre-war boundaries with Belarus. If the Popular Front had its way, maintained the Archbishop, only the Belarusian language would be used at Mass.

The Archbishop said that he has not been officially recognized by the Belarusian government, and his residences in Pinsk and Minsk have not been returned by the authorities. After years of communism and atheism, the Archbishop claimed, there are very few qualified Belarusian priests for the churches, hence the need for Polish assistance. The Belarusian government had agreed to allow 50 Polish priests to come to Belarus and assist in education and catechizing; but at least one who was "over the limit" had been ordered to leave Belarus.

Archbishop Swiatek suggested that the leeway afforded to Evangelicals may be a "divide and conquer" tactic. He also noted that while Uniatism traditionally enjoyed little success in Belarus, there appeared to be a move among Belarusian nationalists to establish Uniatism as a counter-weight to both Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy.

Stanislav Ogurtsov, Head of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information and Human Rights Department

The delegation raised with Ogurtsov the issue of a free press, in view of existing state subsidies and apparent state control. Ogurtsov denied that subsidies necessarily limit freedom of expression in the press and alleged that newspapers do criticize the government. The delegation checked approximately half a dozen Russian-language Minsk newspapers for one day. While admittedly not a representative sample, the papers tended to resemble Moscow newspapers of the Gorbachev early-glasnost era, pointing out shortcoming in the economy, administration of services, etc., but not questioning the essentially centralized nature of the system.

When asked about the claim that church property was not being returned, Ogurtsov stated that "everything that is asked for is returned," denying, in fact, the charges by the Archbishop. As for charges of anti-Polish behavior, he claimed that Belarusian parishioners become upset if a priest speaks Polish in a predominantly Belarusian parish.

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