



# HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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## Testimony :: Ronald J. McNamara

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Good afternoon, and on behalf of the Helsinki Commission I am pleased to welcome you to this briefing on human rights trends in the Russian Federation on behalf of the Commission Chairman Congressman Christopher Smith and our Co-Chairman Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell.

It is fitting that we begin with a moment of silence to honor the life of President Ronald Reagan, a stalwart defender of freedom and human rights who matched his rhetoric with concrete deeds.

(Moment of Silence observed)

My name is Ron McNamara and I am currently serving as the Commission Deputy Chief of Staff. Today's briefing is particularly timely as President Putin will be visiting the United States this week for the Sea Island G-8 Summit and is the latest in a series of Commission events focused on developments in the Russian Federation. Most recently, the Commission held a hearing on Russia on May 20. The full transcript of that hearing can be found on the Commission's website, [www.csce.gov](http://www.csce.gov).

As is customary, there will be a full transcript of today's briefing posted on our website within 24 hours.

As the Commission leadership acknowledged at the May 20th hearing, Russia people has made tremendous strides in advancing democratic progress, human rights, civil liberties and press freedoms since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Much of this progress, I would underscore, was made during the 1990's. With President Putin's ascent to power, influential elements in his government appear determined to reverse Russia's direction and institute a more authoritarian policy a "managed democracy," as some in his inner circle have characterized it.

Against the backdrop, I must admit that I was puzzled by some of the rhetoric in Putin's May 26th State of the Federation address, for example, when he asserts that among his aims are "a mature democracy and a developed civil society." Elsewhere he asserts that "fidelity to democratic values is dictated by the will of our people." Continuing on, Putin insists that, "nobody and nothing will stop Russia on the road to strengthening of democracy and ensuring human rights and freedoms."

In an abrupt and chilling shift latter in the speech, the Russian President charges that some NGOs have made a priority of "obtaining funding from influential foreign or domestic foundations." He goes on to chide such groups for not addressing the most acute problems of the country.

Putin's rhetoric must be judged against the concrete deeds of his administration as they affect pluralistic democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In this regard, there appear to be some significant gaps, especially as concerns the conduct of recent elections in the Russian Federation. The Commission's recent hearing also touched on the bout of "spy mania" that has recently broken out in Russia, with serious implications for some scientists and academics. There are also concerns over the actions taken against media outlets. And of course, there are concerns over the situation in Chechnya as the war that propelled Putin into the presidency enters fifth year.

We are now hearing the term "political prisoner" ominously juxtaposed with the Russian Federation. As the OSCE and other

international organizations work to promote civil society and democratic values in participating States, will Russia be part of the solution or part of the problem? If the latter, what does this portend for the people of Russia and the international community?

As President Bush prepares to meet with his Russian counterpart, our panelists -- prominent in the Russian human rights movement -- are well placed to provide their unique insights into trends in Russia. Is there an overreaction to not only Putin's words but his deeds? Might these issues be left to the Russians themselves to resolve, as was suggested by one witness at the May 20th hearing? What is the role of Russian civil society in advancing democracy, human rights, and the rule of law? What is the role of the OSCE and the international community?