

**Testimony by the Honorable Daniel Fried**  
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**Department of State**  
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**“Human Rights, Civil Society, and Democratic Governance in Russia”**

Thank you, Chairman Brownback and Co-Chairman Smith and Members of the Commission for organizing today’s hearing. I am honored to be with you today. We respect and appreciate the Commission’s sustained commitment to human rights and democracy across Europe, and welcome this opportunity to discuss with you at this hearing the state of democracy and human rights in Russia and U.S.-Russian relations.

I associate myself with everything that my colleague and old friend, Assistant Secretary Barry Lowenkron, has said in outlining the challenges Russia faces in realizing its potential to become a modern democracy and to meet its international commitments on human rights.

Russia’s path toward internal reform and the development of democracy is at the heart of its relationships with the world, including the United States. We cannot and do not separate Russia’s internal development from Russia’s external relations, including with us.

The United States seeks a robust partnership with Russia that strengthens our cooperation in as many areas as possible on issues that matter to us and where our interests coincide. At the same time, as friends, we cannot and do not avoid frank discussions about the areas where we disagree. The United States has, at various times in the past had a principally adversarial relationship with Russia or, especially since 1991, sought to build partnership on the basis of underlying values which we assumed were shared. What is called for now in our relations with Russia is an approach that could be described as constructive cooperation wherever possible to address the common threats and challenges facing us, while being realistic and candid about those areas where we disagree and particularly where our values diverge. Allow me to review briefly both sets of issues which characterize this important and often challenging relationship.

## **AREAS OF COOPERATION**

The United States and Russia share a broad strategic agenda that has produced a number of important successes since 2001 that have advanced our national security and foreign policy interests. These successes demonstrate the importance of our relations with Russia. Let me give you a few examples:

- The U.S.-Russia Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, now led on the U.S. side by Under Secretary Nicholas Burns, has provided a critical channel for dialogue and cooperation with the Russians on counter-terrorism for five and a half years.

- Ongoing cooperation on nonproliferation of conventional arms and WMD, counter-narcotics, and cooperative threat reduction efforts, including the redirection of the work of chemical and biological weapons experts, has allowed us to address these critical global threats.
- We are pursuing vital and energetic cooperation on anti-money laundering initiatives.
- We are making progress toward settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict issue, thanks in large measure to the helpful role played by Russia.
- We are collaborating well in the Balkans, despite some differences of initial assumptions, including by working together in the Contact Group on the final settlement for Kosovo's future status.
- We are cooperating well on Afghanistan, in which Russia, as the largest creditor, recently announced its intention to forgive 100% of Afghanistan's debt within the context of the Paris Club, on Iraqi reconstruction, and most recently, on Iran. While we have not always seen eye-to-eye with Russia on how to proceed in Iran, recent Russian efforts, especially the Russian decision to support referral of Iran to the UN Security Council, have been constructive. We will continue to cooperate closely to advance a shared objective that Iran not achieve the capability to develop nuclear weapons.

There exists considerable potential for greater progress in these and other areas where we share overlapping interests. These areas include, among others: Russia's WTO accession (where we are making progress in concert with other WTO members), and cooperation in the NATO-Russia Council (where we also have made progress in developing NATO's military relations with Russia, but where potential is far from realized). Greater integration of Russia with the international community is in everyone's interests, though, of course, it brings with it obligations and responsibilities.

## **AREAS OF CONCERN**

We are concerned by Russia's policies in some areas, especially regarding Russia's relations with many of the nations of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and Russia backsliding on democracy. It is in these areas where we will continue to address our concerns clearly and directly to our Russian friends, in a spirit of respect and candor.

### **Regional cooperation**

Russia's relations with Eurasian and East European countries present us with opportunities and challenges, particularly in the wake of the transformational developments that have unfolded in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Partly as a result of these events, many Russians now view U.S. involvement in the region with growing wariness and, quite frankly, increasingly in zero-sum terms. On visits to Moscow, one can sense Russian public and official concern about the

prospect of more so-called “colored” revolutions and the fear that these would undermine regional stability, and Russia's security and economic interests.

This Russian view of American policy toward the region is misplaced. The United States does not regard this region as a venue for competition, nor do we believe that U.S. and Russian interests are in conflict there. We believe it is in Russia’s interests as well as our own to have stable and prosperous democracies developing on its borders, which would naturally lead to maintaining good ties with Russia. Failed states and authoritarian regimes, which alienate their own people along Russia’s periphery, do nothing for regional stability, security or prosperity. Indeed, they are a threat to regional stability. It would surely be better for Central Asia and Eastern Europe if Uzbekistan and Belarus, for example, were moving in a reformist rather than increasingly repressive direction. The United States certainly supports economic and political reforms in these countries, and we would hope that Russia would as well.

The recent gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine in which Gazprom reduced the flow temporarily to Ukraine on New Year’s Day raised questions about Russia’s intentions and created a climate of mistrust. As the Secretary noted recently, Russia needs to “demonstrate that it is prepared to act ... as an energy supplier in a responsible way.” This includes greater transparency and openness, not using energy resources as a political tool, and structuring contracts in ways that do not foster corruption, but transparency. Transparency in the energy sector is needed from other countries in the region, too.

In addition, persistent tensions with Georgia and recent Russian suggestions that the unfolding process for resolution of Kosovo’s status could set principles and precedents for resolution of frozen conflicts in Georgia and Moldova have raised questions about Russia's commitment to the territorial integrity of these countries. It does not, frankly, make sense for Russia to support separatist regimes in the breakaway Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This leads to the very instability that concerns Russia. A successful, reforming, stable Georgia ought to be in Russia’s interest. A failed Georgia -- and the prospect of a failed Georgia was very real before the Rose Revolution of 2003 -- could likely become a haven for more and more aggressive organized crime and terrorists that could directly threaten Russia. The United States has and will continue to encourage Russia and Georgia to work together to advance solutions to these frozen conflicts in ways that respect the territorial integrity of Georgia and the legitimate interests of the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

## **Chechnya**

Assistant Secretary Lowenkron has already shared with you our ongoing humanitarian and human rights concerns, as well as concerns about terrorism, in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. The situation in Chechnya has been for some time one of the principal sources of instability, abuses and violence elsewhere in the North Caucasus, a development in no one’s interest. President Putin, in his press conference last week, said, “Today, the situations in some other regions of the North Caucasus concern us even more than that in Chechnya.” We continue to look for ways to support an end to the humanitarian crisis and a genuine political dialogue in Chechnya, which are critical to bringing lasting stability while respecting the territorial integrity of Russia. We hope that last November’s parliamentary election in Chechnya could be a step in

that direction. In particular, we are looking at new ways to expand our assistance programs in the region and other ways to reduce the sources of violence and instability. Ultimately, however, it is the Russian Government that must develop new ways for addressing problems in the region. We are prepared to be a partner with them and the peoples of the region in that process.

## **Democracy**

The lack of progress on the development of democracy in Russia is another area of concern for the United States. The United States supports the objective of Russia's development into a strong, prosperous, democratic country. It is in that spirit as well that we press Russian officials at all levels, publicly and privately, and with Russian civil society, on the importance of human rights and democracy. As friends, we are frank in our meetings, making clear that a commitment to shared values, most importantly those of democracy and human rights, is the foundation for a successful relationship.

As Secretary Rice said in Moscow in May 2005, "For the U.S.-Russia relationship to deepen, and for Russia to gain its full potential, there needs to be greater democratic development." This has been an uneven process in Russia. As Assistant Secretary Lowenkron has said, Russia is not the Soviet Union. The country has experienced great change in the past 15 years, including progress toward respect for human rights and the rule of law, notwithstanding the corruption and disorder that some wrongly associate with democratic development.

Regrettably, recent developments suggest that the Russian Government's commitment to internationally recognized human rights, including democratic norms, media freedom, and the rule of law, has deteriorated. The NGO legislation signed into law and the charges made against NGOs in connection with the alleged spy case are the latest examples.

## **WHAT WE ARE DOING TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY**

In response to these problems, the United States is engaged in active efforts to support Russia's transition, over the medium to long-term, into a genuine democratic state, with features common to all democracies. We are working with our European partners to deliver a consistent message to the Russian Government to live up to its international commitments to democracy and human rights and to help Russians, including those representing Russian civil society, in exercising these rights.

In engaging the Russian Government and supporting civil society, we hope to promote free and fair elections, broaden access to information, strengthen judicial integrity and independence, eliminate corruption and increase transparency, foster greater capacity for citizens to hold their government accountable, maintain vital lifelines of support to key human rights groups, increase exchanges in both directions, and provide Russia's youth with more opportunities to learn democratic skills and values. As the Secretary said recently in response to a question at Georgetown University, we will work with those in Russia who "from below are pressuring for a democratic path...and that means nongovernmental organizations, it means university people, it

means all of the Russians who themselves want a more democratic future.” The Secretary also noted that we need to “keep open for Russia a path toward a democratic West.”

As Russia begins its work as chair of the G-8, we are committed to supporting Russia in advancing its proposed agenda dealing with energy security, infectious diseases and education, as well as continuing G-8 priorities such as counter-proliferation and counterterrorism. But as the Secretary said on January 18 at Georgetown, referring to Russia’s chairmanship of the G-8 this year “...certain obligations and certain expectations come with being the chair of an organization that is avowedly of industrialized democracies.” And so we will encourage the Russian Government to demonstrate to its G-8 partners and the world its commitment to the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law common to all industrialized democracies through practical and real progress.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairman, in his September 2005 speech before the United Nations, President Bush said:

“The work of democracy is larger than holding a fair election; it requires building the institutions that sustain freedom... Democratic nations uphold the rule of law, impose limits on the power of the state... Democratic nations protect private property, free speech and religious expression. Democratic nations grow in strength because they reward and respect the creative gifts of their people. And democratic nations contribute to peace and stability because they seek national greatness in the achievements of their citizens, not the conquest of their neighbors.”

Clearly, Russia has much more to do in these areas to fully secure the benefits of democracy for its people. We will continue to work with Russia to advance democracy and, when necessary -- in a constructive spirit -- to bring shortcomings and concerns to their attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission.