

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOMMENDING INTEGRATION OF CROATIA INTO NATO

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 529) recommending the integration of the Republic of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 529

Whereas the United States recognized the Republic of Croatia on April 7, 1992, acknowledging the decision of the people of Croatia to live in an independent, democratic, and sovereign country;

Whereas since achieving their independence, the people of Croatia have built a democratic society, based on the rule of law, respect for human rights, and a free market economy;

Whereas Croatia is a functioning democracy, with stable institutions guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights, and market economy;

Whereas Croatia has previously cooperated with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by allowing NATO free access to its air space during NATO's 1999 military action against Serbia;

Whereas the United States has shown support for Croatia in many ways since its independence, including by providing Croatia with economic and military assistance that has contributed significantly to the continued success;

Whereas Croatia is a reliable partner of the United States, actively contributing to the stabilization of South Central Europe;

Whereas NATO's Membership Action Plan, which was launched in April 1999, is a program of assistance that provides both goals and a roadmap for countries aspiring to NATO membership;

Whereas Croatia was invited into the Membership Action Plan in May 2002 and has made substantial progress in attaining the necessary level of reforms required for receiving an invitation to start accession talks with NATO;

Whereas the United States, Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia are signatories to the United States-Adriatic Charter, which promotes Euro-Atlantic integration and commits the signatory nations to the values and principles of NATO and to joining the Alliance at the earliest possible time;

Whereas Croatia significantly improved its cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY);

Whereas on October 3, 2005, the European Union decided to open accession negotiations with Croatia based on the assessment of its Council of Ministers that Croatia met the political and economic criteria for candidacy in the European Union, including that Croatia was fully cooperating with the ICTY;

Whereas Croatia has sent troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in support of the war against terrorism and has endorsed and is participating in the Proliferation Security Initiative with like-minded nations across the world to prevent the flow of weapons of mass destruction, missile systems, and related material; and

Whereas Croatia shares the common interests and values of the free and democratic world: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) the Republic of Croatia has made significant progress since its independence in strengthening its democratic institutions and respect for human rights and the rule of law;

(2) Croatia should be commended for its progress in meeting the political, economic, military, and other requirements of NATO's Membership Action Plan, its contribution to the global war on terrorism, and for its constructive participation in the United States-Adriatic Charter;

(3) the Government of Croatia should be commended for its ongoing cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia;

(4) Croatia would make a significant contribution to NATO; and

(5) with complete satisfaction of NATO guidelines and criteria for membership, Croatia should be invited to be a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at the earliest possible date.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 529, a resolution introduced that supports the accession of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Since achieving their independence in 1992, the people of Croatia have built a democratic society based on the rule of law, respect for human rights, and a free market economy. In addition, they have sent troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led security force in support of the war on terrorism and have provided strong support to the U.S. nonproliferation efforts.

Mr. Speaker, just last week the one remaining impediment to Croatia's entry into NATO was removed when General Ante Gotovina, the alleged Croatian war criminal, was arrested in Spain. General Gotovina has been transferred to The Hague to stand trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. His arrest last Thursday in the Canary Islands confirms the truthfulness of the statements by the Croatian Government that Gotovina was not hiding in Croatian territory.

House Resolution 529 commends Croatia's significant progress in strengthening its democratic institutions, its support for the global war on terrorism, and its ability to make significant contributions to NATO. It also ap-

plauds their ongoing cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal.

Finally, the resolution states that once it meets NATO's guidelines and criteria for membership, Croatia should be invited to join NATO at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Speaker, Croatia is not only a strong ally of the United States. The American and Croatian people share a love of freedom and democracy. Croatia has been a steadfast friend, and it will make an important contribution to security and peace in Europe and throughout the world as a member of NATO. Both the Europe and Emerging Threats Subcommittee and the House International Relations Committee unanimously approved House Resolution 529, and I urge its adoption in the full House.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support this resolution and urge all of my colleagues to do so.

At the outset, I want to commend my good friend and fellow Californian (Mr. GALLEGLY) for introducing this important piece of legislation.

Since dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Balkans have gone through a period of profound instability, a deadly civil war, and the worst atrocities seen in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

It would be entirely understandable in this context if Croatia had given in to the authoritarian impulses of its past and remained a state where the prospect for democracy remained a hope rather than a reality. And, indeed, the first Croatian Government after independence had elements of extreme nationalism that helped contribute to the atrocities of the 1990s.

Fortunately, the Croatian people rose above their history and have embarked on fashioning democratic institutions that are mandatory for a pluralistic society. There have been two peaceful transfers of power in Croatia since 1991, and the parliamentary elections of 2003 were generally judged by the international community to be free and fair.

Recently, the Government of Croatia has also adopted a more cooperative approach to working with the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, providing key materials and documents that assist the work of this vital international institution. In fact, Mr. Speaker, just this past week, the last remaining key Croatian indictee, Ante Gotovina, was apprehended by Spanish authorities in the Canary Islands and transferred to The Hague to stand trial. We congratulate all those who had a part in bringing this infamous war criminal to justice, and we urge Croatia to continue its vital cooperation with the court. No civilized country can do less.

In response to this increased cooperation, the European Union has decided

to open accession talks that will eventually lead to the entry of Croatia to the European Union. In this context, Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly appropriate to start looking ahead to eventual full membership for Croatia in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Croatia is already a member of the Partnership for Peace, and its membership would further anchor Croatia in the emerging zone of freedom that continues to sweep across the face of the Eurasian land mass.

Mr. Speaker, membership in NATO has been a linchpin in anchoring countries of the former Warsaw Pact firmly in the Euro-Atlantic framework. This resolution seeks to extend this successful policy to Croatia.

However, we should note that becoming members of both the European Union and NATO will require further reforms by Croatia, and the Croatian Government has much work ahead. We should work together to ensure that Croatia takes all the vital steps, and I hope this resolution will kick off this important dialogue.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this important resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH).

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from California (Mr. LANTOS) for yielding me this time.

When Croatia was struggling for its independence and survival, I was one of the American political figures who challenged my own government for its lack of support for Croatia at a critical hour. Here I take great pride in asking my government in the House of Representatives as a Member to support the integration of the Republic of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I take great pride in my Croatian heritage. My grandfather John Kucinich came from what is now part of Croatia. My father made sure that we stayed close to the Croatian culture and language while we were growing up in Cleveland, and greater Cleveland has a very large Croatian community. I take great pride in the achievements of my Croatian brothers and sisters in the United States as well as in Croatia and those around the world. And I agree that Croatia ought to be fully integrated into the European Union as well as NATO.

I want to at the same time, though, make sure that I make Congress aware of the conduct of the Croatian television network, HRT, which has, unfortunately, denied an American filmmaker access to documentary film footage so as to frustrate the commercial release of her production.

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This is not a routine matter, Mr. Speaker, because this film by Ms. Brenda Brkusic, "Freedom From Despair," has received great critical acclaim. She has won many awards, including the

CINE Golden Eagle Award, which has previously been awarded to international filmmakers Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. She has been recognized by her peers as an emerging talent in the film industry. The Croatian National Foundation has agreed to be her fiscal sponsor; and Amnesty International, the largest human rights organization in the world, has endorsed her film for its strong human rights advocacy.

I believe that the Government of Croatia is sensitive to human rights issues, as has been stated by my friend Mr. GALLEGLY and also by my friend Mr. LANTOS. However, we need to make sure that HRT, which is the state-owned television station, does not escape its responsibility to be sensitive to human rights.

So, I am using this opportunity while I celebrate the support for Croatia, I also believe that it is important to continue to point out wherever there are questions relating to human rights, whether they be in freedom of expression, in telling the truth about the past or in trying to lay the groundwork for a bright future that Congress needs to be the proper forum to make those statements.

Croatia desires to be in NATO to protect itself from outside forces. I want to make sure Croatia is protected from threats to freedom of expression inside the country of Croatia.

When Croatia was struggling for its independence and survival I was one of the American political figures who challenged my own government for its lack of support for Croatia at a critical hour. I take great pride in my Croatian heritage. My grandfather was born in what is now Croatia. I take pride in the achievements of my Croatian brothers and sisters in Croatia, America and around the world.

However, I want to make the Congress aware of the conduct of the Croatian television network HRT, which has deliberately denied an American filmmaker access to documentary film footage, so as to frustrate the commercial release of her production.

The Croatian television network, HRT, initially gave Ms. Brenda Brkusic rights to film footage for student use in the production. Once she asked for commercial rights, HRT refused to cooperate. HRT has refused to answer her questions about the specific price for rights to the footage, giving her general, estimated quotes much higher than are quoted to other people who have inquired for footage rights, and they have suggested unreasonable limitations on those rights. Most recently, when she sent HRT a list of archives she was given by HRT for student use, HRT then informed her that they do not have the right to sell her that material. Ms. Brkusic asked HRT where she must go to get the rights, yet HRT refused to answer her questions. Furthermore, HRT has on other occasions sold that same material that Ms. Brkusic requested to other individuals for broadcast on television.

This is not a routine matter about a routine film. Ms. Brkusic's film, "Freedom from Despair," has received great critical acclaim. She has won many awards, including the CINE Golden Eagle award, which was previously been awarded to the internationally acclaimed

filmmakers Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. She has been recognized by her peers as an emerging talent in the film industry. The Croatian National Foundation has agreed to be her fiscal sponsor, and Amnesty International, the largest human rights organization in the world, has endorsed her film for its strong human rights advocacy.

The fact that numerous media outlets have agreed to donate their footage to her film at no cost is noteworthy. They include: ABC 7 Chicago, NBC 5 Chicago, CBS 2, WGN 9 Chicago, and Greater Chicago Broadcast Ministries. They all granted her worldwide rights to their footage in perpetuity for free, within a few weeks of her request.

HRT, on the other hand, has not only been uncooperative, but obstructive. This distresses me. Given the high profile on this film and the extraordinarily fast rising stardom of its director, a young Croatian-American, HRT's antics will damage the reputation of the Croatian government in the international community.

Croatia desires to be in NATO to protect itself from outside enemies. But who will protect Croatia from threats to freedom of expression inside the country?

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to respond to Mr. KUCINICH.

Mr. Speaker, while I am not aware of the specific details that Mr. KUCINICH outlined, I want to make it very clear I do appreciate his comment about Croatia and his feeling about its accession to NATO.

I would like to say, while I am not familiar with that specific incident, I firmly believe that Croatia's overall record has significantly improved in human rights over the past decade. Although Croatia may not be perfect, just 14 years ago the Croatian people were living under a communist dictatorship and in the intervening period has made great strides in human rights and I believe has a very free press.

Mr. Speaker, Croatia, like many other former communist states in Eastern and Central Europe, are relatively new democracies. There are still some areas that need improvement. However, there should be no doubt that the Croatian Government respects human rights and civil liberties.

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GALLEGLY. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. KUCINICH. First of all, I want to thank my friend for reviewing the history of my commitment. I want to thank my friend for pointing out that Croatia has worked toward fulfillment of commitments on human rights. I would agree with that. At the same time, I would ask my friend to assist me in helping Croatia continue that commitment in an area that is really important, and that is freedom of expression.

I would like to at some point after the debate share with the gentleman the specific concerns that I had that

caused me to bring this up during debate. But I want to thank the gentleman for his sponsorship, for his commitment, and I join him in it.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I would like to personally go on record to make the firm commitment to my good friend Mr. KUCINICH from Ohio to work with him on this issue. I think we are on the same page, and I look forward to working with him.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

(Mr. SMITH of New Jersey asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I would just thank Chairman GALLEGLY for sponsoring this resolution. I am happy to be a cosponsor. I would just make the point that this supports the accession of Croatia into NATO. As either chairman or subcommittee chairman of the Global Human Rights and International Ops Committee for 6 years in the 1990s and as either chairman or cochairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I have watched very closely the issues relating to Croatia over these many years.

As a matter of fact, FRANK WOLF and I actually got into Vukovar while it was under siege and saw the incredible devastation that occurred early in that war with Serbia, and one house after another, one block after another being literally decimated by the Serbian offensive.

But so much has changed. So much has changed dramatically. As a matter of fact, over the last 5 years we have seen the real changes. For a while there, regrettably, the government was very wedded and many people in Croatia to nationalism, and some would even say extreme nationalism. That has now dissipated largely and now we have a Croat group of people, a free press, increasingly the NGOs, the church, all speaking on one accord for more human rights; and I do think over time and hopefully sooner rather than later they will make their way into NATO, provided the additional benchmarks are met.

So this is a good statement of solidarity with the people of Croatia saying that we think it is time. I thank, again, Mr. GALLEGLY for sponsoring this.

Mr. Speaker, as a cosponsor of H. Res. 529, I rise in strong support of this resolution that supports the accession of Croatia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I have followed developments in Croatia extensively, both as a Chairman of the International Relations Committee and as Chairman or Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission. I can particularly recall—indeed, it would be hard to forget—the horror that accompanied the siege and ultimately the fall of Vukovar during the conflict in Croatia in 1991. That was the year Croatia proclaimed its independence from the

disintegrating Yugoslavia. Few would have predicted that in such a short period of time Croatia would be advancing toward European integration at its current pace.

It is true, as stated in this resolution, that since achieving independence, the people of Croatia have built a democratic society, based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and a free market economy. To be more precise, however, it is worth noting that most of this progress occurred in the last five years, after Croatia was able to move beyond the conflict but also to make its own transition away from nationalism. The lack of progress which occurred in the early years of Croatia's independence is not something to hide. It makes the progress achieved since 2000 all the more profound.

It is also true that the people of Croatia deserve the credit. It was the Croatian people who became fed up with supporting the agenda of others. Through non-governmental organizations, independent media outlets and ultimately the ballot box, they earned their independence and freedom. Those representing Croatia's Serb community who made the decision to return to their homes, despite fears and lingering obstacles, also deserve credit for Croatia's progress. They have challenged the country to recover and to reconcile, and Croatia is stronger as a result. The people of Croatia have built a democratic society based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and a free market economy.

They have sent troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led security force in support of the war on terrorism and have provided strong support to U.S. nonproliferation efforts. Mr. Speaker, just last week, the one remaining impediment to Croatia's entry into NATO was removed when General Ante Gotovina, the alleged Croatian war criminal, was arrested in Spain. General Gotovina has been transferred to The Hague to stand trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution states that once it meets NATO guidelines and criteria for membership, Croatia should be invited to join NATO at the earliest possible date. With its location, resources and talented people, a Croatia which satisfies the guidelines and criteria for NATO membership will strengthen the alliance.

Support for Croatia's integration into NATO should also encourage others in the region to make similar progress. Two other Adriatic Charter partners, Albania and Macedonia, immediately come to mind. It is also my deepest hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina, ten years after the Dayton Accords ended the conflict there, can move beyond what have become the restraining effects of that peace agreement's ethnic balancing act, adopt serious constitutional reform and accelerate its integration into Europe as well. Finally, we all hope that people in Serbia will continue their efforts to overcome the bankrupt legacy left by extreme nationalism, in particular by taking every effort to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, so that Serbia, too, can move forward.

H. Res. 529 commends Croatia's significant progress in strengthening its democratic institutions, its support for the global war on terrorism and its ability to make significant contributions to NATO. It also applauds their on-

going cooperation with the international war crimes tribunal.

Mr. Speaker, Croatia is not only a strong ally of the United States. The American and Croatian people share a love of freedom and democracy. Croatia has been a steadfast friend, and it will make an important contribution to security and peace in Europe and throughout the world as a member of NATO.

Both the Europe and Emerging Threats Subcommittee and the House International Relations Committee unanimously approved House Resolution 529, and I urge its passage by the full House.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would just like to thank my good friend, the ranking member of the full committee, whom I have had the honor and pleasure of working with for many years, and thank him not only for his support, but powerful words this evening in support of this resolution. I ask our colleagues to join with us in passing this resolution tonight.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support this resolution as the ranking member of the Helsinki Commission. I visited Croatia in 2000, shortly after new leadership came into power, and I was confident of the country's commitment to reform. I believe, 5 years later, we have seen that the people of Croatia truly are committed to reform.

Of particular interest to me as a determinant of U.S. policy toward southeastern Europe has been the degree to which countries cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, located in The Hague. While Croatia has had a generally good record in this regard, the Gotovina case remained as a blot on that record. Fortunately, with Gotovina's recent apprehension on Spain's Canary Islands, Croatia can put this issue behind it.

I hope, however, that the people of Croatia will view the work of the Tribunal as a necessary step to determine guilt or innocence, and that Croatian courts will similarly seek justice regarding cases relating to war crimes and crimes against humanity that it considers, regardless of who was responsible for these crimes and who were the victims.

I also call for all remaining indictees to be apprehended and transferred to The Hague, in particular Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. The House made a similar call earlier this year when passing the resolution marking the massacre at Srebrenica in Bosnia. There has been some progress this year, but both Bosnian Serb and Serbian authorities need to do more. Otherwise, they will fall further behind in European and Euro-Atlantic integration to their own detriment.

Mr. VISCLOSKEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the co-chair of the House Croatian Caucus in strong support of H. Res. 529. I would first like to thank Chairman GALLEGLY for authoring this legislation, the ranking member on the Europe Subcommittee, Mr. WEXLER, as well as Mr. RADANOVICH, my co-chair of the House Croatian Caucus for all of their tireless work advocating for Croatia.

Since 1994, on more than one occasion, Congress has endorsed the enlargement of NATO. Most recently, in 2003, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia signed accession protocols to the

Washington Treaty of 1949 signifying their willingness to join NATO. Since its independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1992, Croatia has made substantial progress in attaining the necessary level of military and political reforms required for receiving an invitation to begin accession negotiations with NATO. I am pleased to say that just this past October, the European Union began negotiations with Croatia based on its assessment that Croatia met the political and economic criteria for candidacy in the European Union.

Croatia is a strong ally of the United States in the War Against Terrorism. Croatia has sent troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force and has endorsed and is participating in the Proliferation Security Initiative to prevent the flow of weapons of mass destruction to that region.

Stability in South Central Europe is a very high priority, and Croatia has become a valuable, constructive partner in this delicate region. Given the potential for future regional conflicts, NATO should want to take advantage of the greater contribution that Croatia would make toward peace and stability as a full member of NATO.

The resolution before us today expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that Croatia has made significant progress since its independence in strengthening its democratic institutions and its respect for human rights and the rule of law. In addition, it commends the Republic of Croatia for the progress it has made since the end of its war for independence. Further, the Resolution commends Croatia for its progress in meeting the political, economic, military, and other requirements of NATO's Membership Action Plan, for its contribution to the global war on terrorism, and for its constructive participation in the U.S.-Adriatic Charter.

In closing Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again thank the International Relations Committee for reporting this resolution and urge my colleagues to support this resolution and approve Croatia's accession into NATO.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 529, recommending Croatia's integration into NATO. As a co-chair of the Congressional Croatian Caucus I am pleased to support this bipartisan resolution. The success to date of H. Res. 529 is due to the vision and resolve shown by members of the Caucus to effectively drive this important measure forward, in addition to the hard work of the National Federation of Croatian Americans, NFCA, and the Croatian Embassy.

The success of H. Res. 529 is yet another testimony that ongoing reforms by the Croatian Government are reaping significant rewards that are of immense benefit both domestically and internationally. This is crucial in paving the country's path towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Voting in favor for this cause will send a very strong message that the significant progress Croatia has made to date has not gone unrecognized in Congress. More importantly, the full adoption of H. Res. 529 will officially sanction and invigorate mutually complementary U.S./Croatian strategic interests towards trans-Atlantic integration issues.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY). The question is on the mo-

tion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 529, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

URGING RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO WITHDRAW LEGISLATION RESTRICTING ESTABLISHMENT OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 312) urging the Government of the Russian Federation to withdraw or modify proposed legislation that would have the effect of severely restricting the establishment, operations, and activities of domestic and foreign nongovernmental organizations in the Russian Federation, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 312

Whereas Russian Federation President Putin has stated that "modern Russia's greatest achievement is the democratic process (and) the achievements of our civil society";

Whereas the unobstructed establishment and free and autonomous operations and activities of nongovernmental organizations and a robust civil society free from excessive government control are central and indispensable elements of a democratic society;

Whereas the free and autonomous operations of nongovernmental organizations in any society necessarily encompass activities, including political activities, that may be contrary to government policies;

Whereas domestic, international, and foreign nongovernmental organizations are crucial in assisting the Russian Federation and the Russian people in tackling the many challenges they face, including in such areas as education, infectious diseases, and the establishment of a flourishing democracy;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation has proposed legislation that would have the effect of severely restricting the establishment, operations, and activities of domestic, international, and foreign nongovernmental organizations in the Russian Federation, including erecting unprecedented barriers to foreign assistance;

Whereas the State Duma of the Russian Federation is considering the first draft of such legislation;

Whereas the restrictions in the first draft of this legislation would impose disabling restraints on the establishment, operations, and activities of nongovernmental organizations and on civil society throughout the Russian Federation, regardless of the stated intent of the Government of the Russian Federation;

Whereas the stated concerns of the Government of the Russian Federation regarding the use of nongovernmental organizations by foreign interests and intelligence agencies to undermine the Government of the Russian Federation and the security of the Russian Federation as a whole can be fully addressed without imposing disabling restraints on nongovernmental organizations and on civil society;

Whereas there is active debate underway in the Russian Federation over concerns regarding such restrictions on nongovernmental organizations;

Whereas the State Duma and the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly play a central role in the system of checks and balances that are prerequisites for a democracy;

Whereas the first draft of the proposed legislation has already passed its first reading in the State Duma;

Whereas President Putin has indicated his desire for changes in the first draft that would "correspond more closely to the principles according to which civil society functions"; and

Whereas Russia's destiny and the interests of her people lie in her assumption of her rightful place as a full and equal member of the international community of democracies; Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress—

(1) urges the Government of the Russian Federation to withdraw the first draft of the proposed legislation that would have the effect of severely restricting the establishment, operations, and activities of domestic, international, and foreign nongovernmental organizations in the Russian Federation, or to modify the proposed legislation to entirely remove these restrictions; and

(2) in the event that the first draft of the proposed legislation is not withdrawn, urges the State Duma and the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly to modify the legislation to ensure the unobstructed establishment and free and autonomous operations and activities of such nongovernmental organizations in accordance with the practices universally adopted by democracies, including the provisions regarding foreign assistance.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in very strong support of H. Con. Res. 312, introduced by the very distinguished chairman of our full committee, Chairman HENRY HYDE, urging the Government of the Russian Federation to withdraw or modify proposed legislation that would have a chilling effect on civil society in that country.

Amazingly, as Russia prepares to assume leadership of the G-8 and the Council of Europe next month, Russian lawmakers have been working feverishly to subordinate pockets of independent thought and action to state control. The focus of recent days has been on nongovernmental organizations, especially those working in the fields of human rights and democracy. In essence, the provisions would require all nongovernmental organizations to re-register with a government commission empowered with invasive powers to monitor NGO activities.

The Duma has passed amendments to the Law on Public Associations by a vote of 370-18, but the measure must go through further readings scheduled for next week and signed then by Vladimir Putin before it becomes law. In mid-