

Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring the life of Bert Stephen Crane for his unwavering leadership and recognizing his accomplishments and outstanding contributions to the community. God bless him always.

HONORING JAMES "JIM" WEST, A BELOVED LEADER IN THE MODESTO COMMUNITY

Mr. DENHAM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and honor the life of a beloved leader in the Modesto community, James "Jim" West, who died at the age of 81 on Sunday, March 13, 2016, surrounded by his loving family.

Jim was born on January 22, 1935, to Donald and Ruby West. He grew up in the heart of the Central Valley, Modesto, California, and graduated from Modesto High School in 1953.

Jim furthered his education at Menlo College before attending Kansas State University, where he obtained his bachelor's degree in feed technology.

In 1958, Jim joined the thriving and successful company his grandfather had started in 1909, the J.S. West Milling Company. The family-owned business is known for their production of eggs, feed, and propane.

Through years of hard work and dedication, Jim became shareholder, secretary, and vice president of the J.S. West Milling Company board. Jim's reputation as an honest businessman helped build the J.S. West Milling Company's successful and trustworthy name.

Jim was also dedicated to improving the community he lived in. He was active in several industry and civic groups, most notably as president of the Pacific Egg and Poultry Association in 1993 and chairman of the American Egg Board in 1997.

He was an active member of the Western Poultry Scholarship and Research Foundation, Memorial Hospital Foundation, Delta Blood Bank, and Modesto Junior College Foundation. He was also a proud member of the Modesto Rotary since 1969 and later served as president.

Jim had a genuine love for the people and the community he worked tirelessly to help. He was known for his kindness, generosity, and strong family values. Succeeding Jim are his wife of 44 years, Jessie West, their two sons, and three daughters.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring and recognizing the life of Jim West for his unwavering leadership, many accomplishments, and contributions to the community. God bless him always.

NASCC 75TH ANNIVERSARY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FARENTHOLD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi as it celebrates its 75th anniversary this month.

NASCC or, as it was once known, the University of Air, has been training pi-

lots, navigators, aerologists, gunners, and radio operators since 1941.

NASCC was founded in 1938 under the 75th Congress to train new pilots and technical crew to bolster our Nation's air forces. The air base serves the southeastern portion of the United States, from Texas to Florida, and trains naval aviators nationwide along with other pilots from our foreign allies.

Today NASCC is not just a naval base. It includes tenant commands for the U.S. Army, Coast Guard, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The Corpus Christi Army depot rebuilds and updates rotary winged aircraft—helicopters—and is saving our country millions of dollars. The depot facility and other tenants make the base extremely cost effective for both the Army, Navy, and taxpayers.

The Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Patrol operate a variety of aircraft from the base, including predator drones surveilling our border, which is great because we have a new generation of pilots interacting with UAVs getting their training at NASCC.

NASCC's current commander officer is Captain Randolph F. Pierson, who joins a long line of leaders to serve in Corpus Christi.

During World War II, it was said there wasn't a naval aviator who hadn't earned their wings at the air station. These World War II naval aviators were critical members of the U.S. military, giving the U.S. an edge in battles across the Pacific and over Europe with our superior air power.

It was American air power, combined with U.S. naval power, that played a critical role in turning back the tide of Japanese at the Battle of Midway.

It was American air power that dealt a decisive blow against the Japanese in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, winning one of the last largest air battles in history.

After World War II, it was American air power that flew food supplies to the starving people of Berlin during the Berlin Airlift.

This was all accomplished with graduates of the Corpus Christi University of Air, NASCC.

Today the training program is approximately 18 months and, due to the increased complexity of modern aircraft, it just takes longer. Six hundred people per year are trained at the facility and go on to serve their country in the U.S. Navy and Marines as pilots, engineers, and technical crew.

These folks learn skills through the program that propel them through a successful life in the military and a successful life in the private sector after their service ends.

Some of the notable flyers who have earned their wings at NASCC include former President George H.W. Bush, who was in the third graduating class. He was commissioned just 3 days before his 19th birthday.

Naval Air Station Corpus Christi graduates also include several Mem-

bers of Congress, including fellow Texas Representative PETE OLSON, Representative JOE WILSON of South Carolina, and Senator JOHN MCCAIN of Arizona.

Some NASCC grads are not content to remain in the blue skies of the Earth. Many astronauts who led the charge into space after getting their wings at NASCC include Neil Armstrong and John Glenn.

Other notable graduates include game show host Bob Barker, actor Tyrone Power, Vice Admiral James Stockdale, and Medal of Honor winner Edward "Butch" O'Hare.

The Navy's distinguished flying team, the Blue Angels, were headquartered in Corpus Christi until 1955. Today, CNATRA, the Chief of Naval Air Training, now Admiral Bull, based in NASCC, commands the Blue Angels.

The people of the United States owe much to the graduates of NASCC. These heroes have fought for our country since the construction of the base in 1941.

I believe it is important to not only honor the men and women in uniform who serve at bases like NASCC and those around the country, but also to honor their families and the civilian workers who make it all possible.

Due to its importance to our country during World War II and over the years until today, it is my privilege to let you know about NASCC.

After 75 years of operation, the Naval Air Station is still training pilots, still serving the country, and still being a symbol of pride to Texas and the entire Nation.

PUTIN'S INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah (Mr. STEWART) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEWART. Mr. Speaker, in the tumult of a Presidential election, a lot of important and newsworthy events don't get enough attention.

One such event last week was the Czech Republic's release of Ali Fayyad, a dangerous Hezbollah terrorist who was indicted in 2014 by the United States for conspiracy to kill officers and employees of the United States.

The United States had requested Mr. Fayyad's extradition to the United States, and the Czech courts had approved that extradition request. But the Czech Minister of Justice, who is aligned with Vladimir Putin, refused to honor that decision and released this terrorist.

Fayyad has deep ties with the Russian black market for weapons and was an adviser to the former President of Ukraine and a close ally of Vladimir Putin.

It appeared at one point that Mr. Fayyad was exchanged for several Czech nationals being held hostage in Lebanon, but journalists have since shown that the hostage situation was a sham staged by his family and defense team.

This episode is significant for several reasons. First, Mr. Fayyad's presence and influence in Central Europe are yet more evidence—as if we needed more—that Iran, through its proxies like Hezbollah, has tentacles throughout world.

More importantly, the event demonstrates Vladimir Putin's increasing influence with an important member of NATO. And it is not just the Czech Republic.

This is a trend, and it is more concerning. Mr. Putin appears to be quietly undermining NATO by leveraging his cronies in influential positions in a number of European nations.

Several months ago I asked the Congressional Research Service to look into the connections between Putin and high-ranking officials in Europe, particularly NATO members. The findings are alarming.

The report tracks pro-Russian rhetoric and actions of leaders in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and Hungary as well as the increasingly evident ideological link between Europe's far-right parties and the leadership of Russia.

□ 1045

Mr. Speaker, though I won't read the entire report at this time, I will include it in the RECORD.

I say all this, recognizing that Russia is a much more proximate threat to our European allies than they are to us. It would be foolish not to acknowledge that European leaders are in a different position than we are. The democratic institutions that we take for granted are still fragile in many of these countries, and Putin knows that. However, what makes it all the more important is the fact that we, as the world's superpower, do more than offer simple condemnations of Putin's actions.

Both the House and the Senate held hearings last year exploring Russian propaganda efforts. This was a good start, but now we need to dig deeper to understand all of the levels of Russian pressure, including agents of Russian influence who occupy high political offices and own national and regional media outlets.

More than anything, we need the President to get off of the sidelines and show that he is serious about countering Putin. That could start with a serious effort to determine who cooperated with Russia in releasing Mr. Fayyad, and then issue targeted sanctions on those officials.

Mr. Fayyad is likely to continue plotting to harm the U.S., and his release isn't a simple oversight that we should ignore.

MEMORANDUM

DECEMBER 8, 2015.

To: Representative Chris Stewart.

Subject: Pro-Russia Viewpoints Among Selected Leaders in Central and Eastern Europe.

This memorandum responds to your request for information about Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe, with a

focus on selected political leaders. It provides additional information about Russian influence through ties with European far-right parties. Please contact me if you have questions or would like additional information.

Introduction

One of the main ways analysts have to gauge Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe is by looking at the reactions of regional political leaders to the conflict in Ukraine and European Union (EU) debates about Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia. While some patterns may be discerned, it is difficult to assess the degree to which various data points are directly attributable to Russian influence, as opposed to a variety of other factors and interests. Economic relationships and energy ties can be expressed in monetary amounts, but less straightforward is how to translate such figures into identifiable political and policy influence. Other aspects of Russian influence can be even more difficult to quantify. Russian involvement in political and corporate dealings is not always a transparent process that is reflected in available open source information, frequently making for some degree of speculation when seeking to reach conclusions about the motivations driving various statements and actions.

Overall, attitudes toward Russia in Central and Eastern Europe are colored by historical experiences, geographic proximity, economic ties, and energy dependence. Many officials and analysts in Central and Eastern Europe relate that they have not been especially surprised by Russia's actions in Ukraine and assert that their past efforts to convey concerns about President Putin's revanchist ambitions went largely unheeded in the United States and Western Europe. In light of European history, especially the Soviet Union's domination of the region during the Communist era, Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe is not a new phenomenon brought on in relation to the Ukraine crisis. In 2009, for example, analysts alleged that Czech President Václav Klaus, influenced by Moscow, worked to destabilize the Czech government and undermine passage of the EU's Lisbon Treaty.

As the Visegrád Four (V4) group, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary have attempted to engage in regional cooperation with one another on a range of issues, and to form common positions on foreign policy and EU matters. The countries have struggled to find any group coherence with regard to Russia and the conflict in Ukraine, however. Poland's consistent and forceful advocacy of a robust response to Russia's actions made it something of an outlier in Central and Eastern Europe. Whether owing to a desire to preserve energy and economic ties with Russia, concerns about provoking Russia further, or the perception that Russia's actions in Ukraine are distant and do not pose a direct threat to their countries, the governments of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary have tended to be more ambiguous and reserved on the topic. Some observers note that at times the leaders of these countries appear to have prioritized short-term national economic interests over wider strategic concerns.

Nevertheless, while many in the V4 countries and elsewhere in Europe may remain skeptical about the wisdom and utility of sanctions as an attempt to deter Russia's actions in Ukraine, the measures have been adopted by the unanimous agreement of all 28 EU member states. Observers assert that this consensus was based on a common assessment by the member state governments that sending a strong message to Russia's

leadership through meaningful sanctions was a political imperative outweighing economic disruption and discomfort. Observers further note that action must at times be viewed separately from rhetoric and political "doublespeak" that may be aimed at a domestic audience.

The Czech Republic

Opinions on Russia and the Ukraine crisis among Czech political elites are fractured. At one end of the spectrum is the pro-Kremlin position of Czech President Miloš Zeman, which appears to accept Russia's claims about the conflict and opposes all sanctions. In June 2014, Zeman stated, "I cannot see any reason why to isolate the Russian Federation from the European Union, why to speak about sanctions, blockade, and embargo. There is a chance of increasing the level of our cooperation. . . ." At the other end of the spectrum is the position of the center-right opposition TOP 09 party, led by former Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, which has advocated tougher sanctions and providing military aid to Ukraine.

In between them is the view characterized by Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka of the center-left Social Democratic Party, who accepted sanctions but sought exemptions based on economic interests and called for early removal of the measures. Following the adoption of wider EU sanctions in July 2014, Sobotka stated, "Neither for the European Union, nor for Russia, is it favorable to get into a drawn-out trade war and that some new economic and political Iron Curtain appears on Ukraine's eastern border." There is also a multilateralist view characterized by Foreign Minister Lubomir Zaorálek, who argued that the Czech Republic should belong to the EU mainstream and support the sanctions as an efficient tool.

The Czech foreign and defense ministries "view Russia as a country which is destabilising the European security architecture and . . . making attempts to revise the international order," whereas "the minister for industry and trade sees Russia as a key non-EU economic partner for the Czech Republic, with whom cooperation needs to be enhanced." Prime Minister Sobotka has attempted to balance these competing viewpoints, but the splits have left the Czech government without a clear stance on Russia.

Two-thirds of the natural gas consumed in the Czech Republic comes from Russia, accounting for nearly 15% of the country's primary energy supply. In the context of sanctions and Russia's economic slowdown, the Czech economy has been negatively affected by a substantial decline in Russian imports of Czech goods and reduced numbers of Russian tourists visiting the Czech Republic. Russia accounts for only 4% of Czech exports and 0.3% of foreign investment in the Czech Republic, however. By contrast, over 80% of Czech exports go to EU countries, and the Czech economy is tied most closely to Germany.

President Zeman and Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister Andrej Babiš, in particular, have been recently cited by one prominent commentator as leading politicians who "frequently echo or repeat Russian slogans." Zeman previously served as prime minister from 1998–2002 at the head of the Social Democratic Party, which he left in 2007, before he became the Czech Republic's first popularly elected president in 2013 (the president was formerly chosen by parliament). The powers of the Czech presidency are largely ceremonial, and the power to lead the government falls squarely on the prime minister. Nevertheless, the president is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, exerts an influence on foreign policy, and makes a number of formal appointments to

the central bank and judiciary. Some analysts assert that Zeman has sought to push the boundaries of his powers to influence government policy and legislation.

Although Zeman has also been strongly pro-EU and supported close security ties with the United States through NATO, his history of outspoken statements has labeled him as one of the most pro-Russian leaders in Europe. He has condemned the EU sanctions against Russia, strongly criticized the Ukrainian government's approach to the conflict, and termed the conflict in Ukraine a "civil war." Analysts assert that such statements have countered and undermined the Czech government and foreign ministry and threatened to alienate Czech allies in NATO, including the United States, and its partners in the EU.

In May 2015, Zeman, who speaks fluent Russian, defied calls for the diplomatic isolation of Russia by joining Slovak Prime Minister Fico as one of the few European leaders attending the 70th anniversary commemoration of the end of World War II in Moscow. Opposition leaders asserted that the visit seemed "choreographed by Kremlin propagandists," with President Putin commenting, "I want to say that it pleases us that there are still leaders in Europe who are able to express their opinion, and who follow an independent political line."

While some observers maintain that Zeman is on balance an outspoken personality who is not afraid to speak his mind, others point to his close ties with businessmen connected to Russia as a potential source of influence. Martin Nejedlý, the head of Russian energy company Lukoil's Czech subsidiary, and Miroslav Slouf, a lobbyist for Lukoil, reportedly financed much of Zeman's presidential campaign, were part of his campaign team, and remain close advisers. Zeman has also previously asserted that he is a "long-time friend" of Vladimir Yakunin, a former KGB agent who was head of Russian Railways and a close associate and ally of President Putin until his retirement earlier this year. Yakunin was included on the list of Russian officials placed under U.S. sanctions following the annexation of Crimea.

Andrej Babiš is reportedly the Czech Republic's second-richest man, worth an estimated \$2.4 billion. Babiš, who is of Slovak origin, founded the ANO party (ANO stands for Action of Dissatisfied Citizens in Czech, although "ano" also means "yes" in Czech) in 2011, initially as a personal political vehicle. Promoting populist, anti-corruption messages, ANO came in second place in the 2013 Czech election, and Babiš became deputy prime minister and finance minister in a coalition government led by Prime Minister Sobotka's Social Democrats. Babiš has continued to position himself and his party as outsiders to the Czech political establishment, and as a "movement" that eludes left-right characterization rather than a political party (ANO belongs to the centrist-liberal Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, ALDE, in the European Parliament). With recent polls showing ANO to be the Czech Republic's most popular party and Babiš its most trusted politician, he is considered a leading possibility for prime minister following the 2017 election.

The intersection between Babiš' continued business interests and his political career has been controversial. In the early 1990s, while an executive with the state-owned trading company Petrimex, Babiš took over ownership and control of a newly founded Petrimex subsidiary, Agrofert, using a still-undisclosed source of foreign financing channeled through Switzerland. Reportedly aided by the use of political connections to acquire state-owned enterprises using state-guaranteed loans that were not always paid back,

Babiš grew Agrofert into an agriculture, food, and chemical giant that is now the Czech Republic's fourth-largest company and has over 200 subsidiaries of its own. Babiš has been accused of using his government position to benefit his private business interests, for example in a May 2015 parliamentary vote to continue state subsidies of biofuels, a policy of strong benefit to Agrofert.

In 2013, Agrofert acquired the MAFRA media group, housing two of the country's most widely read newspapers, most popular radio station, and a leading television channel. Observers assert that these media outlets have subsequently avoided any criticism of Babiš, promoted his activities, and increased criticism of political opponents. Some analysts have argued that Babiš combination of political, economic, and media power threatens the stability of the Czech Republic's democratic institutions. In March 2015, Prime Minister Sobotka told his party's congress:

"The problem is, however, that Andrej Babiš, chairman of our coalition partner, did not give up his economic and media influence after he became deputy prime minister and finance minister. He now concentrates political, economic and media power whose extent has been unprecedented in this country since 1989. He is at permanent risk of conflict of interest."

Babiš' past has also caused controversy. The Czech Republic maintains a "ustration law" passed in 1991 to keep former high-level communists and secret police collaborators out of top government posts. Babiš has been waging a court battle with Slovakia's Nation's Memory Institute, which oversees communist-era secret police files. With Babiš' secret police file having gone missing long ago, the institute presented a case in 2013 piecing together files it asserted as circumstantial evidence that Babiš was an informant code named "Bures." In June 2014, a Slovak judge ruled in favor of removing Babiš from the list of secret police collaborators after two former agents testified in his defense, finding there was not sufficiently clear documentary evidence of deliberate collaboration. The institute is reportedly continuing the investigation, however, after an appeals court ruled the agents' testimony inadmissible. Allegations of Babiš' ties to communist-era security and intelligence agencies are additionally fueled by his close association with Agrofert board chairman Libor Široký, a former member of a Czechoslovak secret police unit that had close ties with the KGB.

Babiš has repeatedly criticized the EU sanctions against Russia, and has been variously quoted stating that NATO "cannot stay on this idea that Russia is the biggest problem," "Ukraine is not ready for the European Union and Ukraine was always under the influence of Russia," and, with regard to responsibility for Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine, "What is true or not true, who knows?" Babiš has asserted that such skepticism is a legitimate part of the European debate and that he and his party are strongly pro-NATO and pro-EU, refuting allegations that he is "pro-Russian" or has secretive ties to Russia. Nevertheless, with Babiš considered a possible future prime minister of the Czech Republic, his oligarchic profile and communist-era past, combined with his statements on sanctions and the Ukraine crisis, have caused speculation and concern about possible Russian connections and influence.

Slovakia

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico has been an outspoken critic of EU sanctions against Russia and has pursued cordial relations with Moscow during his time in office.

Fico has been prime minister since 2012, and previously from 2006-2010, at the head of the center-left Direction-Social Democracy party (SMERSD). Fico (with Czech President Zeman) was one of only two European leaders to attend events in Moscow in May 2015 commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and returned to Moscow in June 2015 with a government delegation to discuss economic and energy ties. Analysts and commentators asserted that these visits played into Russian propaganda by allowing the Kremlin to show it has partners in Europe who are inclined toward cooperation, undermining U.S. and European attempts to portray Russia as diplomatically isolated.

Slovakia is one of the EU countries most exposed economically to Russia: Slovakia depends on Russia for 98% of the natural gas it consumes (accounting for over 27% of the country's primary energy supply), imports oil and nuclear fuel from Russia, and its state budget relies to a significant extent on revenue from transit fees associated with Russian gas (via Ukraine). Slovakia is the main conduit for Russian gas to Europe. In September 2014, Slovakia began providing gas supplies to Ukraine, leading Russia to cut gas flows to Slovakia by a reported 50% the following month. The Slovak military also remains heavily dependent on Russian armaments. At the same time, Russia accounts for only 3-4% of Slovakia's exports, with the vast majority going to other EU countries.

Fico drew particular attention in June 2014 when he compared the idea of U.S. and NATO troops being stationed in Slovakia to the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia: "I cannot imagine that there would be foreign soldiers on our territory in the form of some bases...Slovakia has its historical experience with participation of foreign troops. Let us remember the 1968 invasion. Therefore this topic is extraordinarily sensitive to us."

Analysts assert that Slovak attitudes toward Russia are a complicated mixture of interests and emotions that make it hard to understand and predict Slovak policy toward Russia. Some analysts perceive Fico's Russia policy as an attempt to balance the competing imperatives of relations with NATO and the EU with Slovakia's energy and economic relationship with Russia, while attempting to appeal to public opinion, business interests, and a Russophile wing of his party. For example, Fico has criticized EU sanctions but not blocked them, and he strongly criticized Ukrainian measures that have threatened the flow of gas, but also provided "reverse flow" gas supplies to Ukraine. Moscow opposes the "reverse flow" of gas from Europe back to Ukraine and considers it illegal.

Overall, national economic interests appear to be paramount in Fico's approach. Slovakia did not block the expansion of EU sanctions in July 2014 after securing exemptions for sectors important to its economy (such as the export of automobiles to Russia), but Fico has maintained that his government might "reject certain sanctions that would hurt national interests." Following the adoption of the wider EU sanctions and the announcement of Russia's retaliatory measures, Fico stated, "Why should we jeopardize the EU economy that begins to grow? If there is a crisis situation, it should be solved by other means than meaningless sanctions. Who profits from the EU economy decreasing, Russia's economy having trouble, and Ukraine economically on its knees?"

Hungary

Alongside Hungary's commitment to NATO and a close security partnership with

the United States, the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban has emphasized that it has other foreign policy interests, including building closer relations with Russia. Some analysts assert that the Hungarian government appears to be the most “pro-Russian” government of the NATO and EU countries. Although Hungary is still a democracy and Russia is not, ideological similarities between Prime Minister Orban and President Putin contribute to cordial relations to a certain extent: both leaders have been organizing their respective states in contrast to the “liberal, Western model,” with Orban naming Russia (along with Singapore, China, India, and Turkey) in a July 2014 speech as the type of state model likely to be successful in the future. In addition, Putin’s doctrine of “protecting” ethnic Russian populations that live outside the borders of Russia closely evokes the nationalist view in Hungary of ethnic Hungarian minorities that live outside the borders of the country. According to some Western observers, Hungary has played an unhelpful role in the Ukraine crisis by advocating greater autonomy for a region of western Ukraine inhabited by approximately 150,000 ethnic Hungarians. Breaking with European attempts to portray Russia as diplomatically isolated, Orban hosted Putin in a state visit in February 2015. Orban has been prime minister since 2010, and previously from 1998–2002, at the head of the conservative Fidesz party.

Hungary has considerable ties to Russia in the energy sector. Russia provides over 76% of the natural gas consumed in Hungary, accounting for one quarter of the country’s primary energy supply, and Hungary was a strong supporter of Gazprom’s now-cancelled South Stream pipeline that would have crossed Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, and Slovenia (bypassing Ukraine) to reach Austria and Italy. Russia also supplies the fuel for Hungary’s Paks nuclear power plant, which provides about 40% of the country’s electricity. Under a controversial deal reached in early 2014, Russia will loan Hungary €10 billion to finance the construction by Russia’s state-owned Rosatom of two new units at the Paks plant.

Although it joined its EU partners in condemning the annexation of Crimea as illegal, and signed on to the multiple rounds of sanctions imposed against Russia by the EU, Hungary has been among the countries most reluctant to impose sanctions in response to Russia’s actions in the Ukraine conflict. In an August 2014 interview, just two weeks after the adoption of expanded sectoral EU sanctions and one week after the announcement of retaliatory Russian measures against European food products, Prime Minister Orban called for a re-think of the EU’s sanctions, stating, “The sanctions policy pursued by the West, that is, ourselves, a necessary consequence of which has been what the Russians are doing, causes more harm to us than to Russia . . . In politics, this is called shooting oneself in the foot.” Although Russia is Hungary’s largest non-EU trading partner, with Hungarian exports to Russia represent less than 3% of Hungary’s total exports. The Hungarian economy is tied much more closely to the German economy.

Russia and European Far-Right Parties

In recent years, there has been an increasingly evident ideological link between European far-right parties and the leadership of Russia. Far-right parties in V4 countries that now take openly pro-Russia positions include: Jobbik in Hungary; the Slovak National Party (SNS) and People’s Party Our Slovakia (L’SNS); the Czech Workers’ Party of Social Justice (DSSS); Self-Defense of the

Republic of Poland (SRP) and Polish Falanga.

Elsewhere in Europe, pro-Russia positions are held by: France’s National Front (FN); Italy’s Lega Nord and the New Force party in Italy; the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD); the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ); the Flemish Interest (VB) party in Belgium; the Order and Justice (TT) party in Lithuania; Golden Dawn in Greece; the Nationalist Party of Bulgaria (NPB) and Bulgaria’s Ataka Party; and the British National Party (BNP).

While many of these parties remain well on the fringes of their countries’ political scene, Jobbik, FPÖ, FN, Golden Dawn, Lega Nord and TT have had significant electoral successes in winning seats in national parliaments and the European Parliament.

Analysts assert that supporting far-right parties serves as a way for Russia to work against European unity. Among other elements of far-right ideology (typically including some combination of extreme nationalism, “law and order” and the preservation of “traditional” conservative or family values, and anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, or anti-Islam sentiments), most of these parties tend to be anti-establishment and anti-EU. Some can be characterized as anti-NATO/U.S. or isolationist, and some focus on problems with neighboring countries. Jobbik, for example, in addition to promoting strongly anti-Roma, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and anti-Western stances, promotes the idea that Slovakia and Romania are enemies of Hungary due to the ethnic Hungarian minorities living across the border in those countries.

Although direct evidence of Russian financial support for far-right parties remains for the most part difficult to identify, there is a widespread belief that Russia has covertly funneled money to parties such as the FN and Jobbik. In November 2014, news outlets reported the discovery that the FN had received a potentially illegal €9 million loan from a Russian bank with close ties to President Putin. Jobbik has also long been under suspicion of receiving Russian (and Iranian) money, and the party’s finances have been questioned in the Hungarian Parliament and investigated by the Hungarian government. After publishing an annual budget of approximately \$10,000 per year for 2004–2008, Jobbik ran a well-financed campaign in the 2009 European Parliament election and reportedly spent over \$100,000 in the 2010 national election, when it won nearly 16% of the vote. Analysts argued that the sudden increase in funding could not have been due to domestic contributions. As Jobbik began running a nationwide party operation, it also abandoned its previous anti-Russian rhetoric to advocate both good relations with Russia and Hungary leaving the EU to join Russia’s Eurasian Union. Jobbik now receives a state allowance allotted to parties in parliament and has an official budget of over \$2.3 million. Suspicions of additional private financing from abroad persist, however. A potentially key figure in Jobbik’s ties to Moscow is Bela Kovács, a Jobbik Member of the European Parliament who played a central role in the party’s rise in 2009 and has been a vocal supporter of Russia in the European Parliament. In October 2015, the European Parliament granted a request by the Hungarian government to lift Kovács’ immunity from arrest in order to face allegations of spying for Russia.

Russian support for far-right parties is not merely financial. The Russian government has also been proactive in offering organizational expertise, political know-how, and media assistance to parties on Europe’s far-right. Russian support has reportedly included establishing and coordinating pro-Russian parties, non-governmental civil or-

ganizations, and think tanks, and providing support to friendly media outlets. Russian diplomacy also offers far-right parties access to political networks, including by sponsoring forums and conferences that develop and coordinate national doctrines and policies and encourage the formation of party groups or families. To some extent, analysts attribute ties between a number of European far-right parties and parallels in the policies of parties in a range of countries to this type of Russian-sponsored network-building.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o’clock and 46 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Rabbi John Linder, Temple Solel, Paradise Valley, Arizona, offered the following prayer:

God of all people and all understanding, give us strength and reason during these perilous times; bring consolation to the bereaved in Belgium. Be with our public servants here as they represent these great United States.

Collectively, brothers and sisters, you are a tapestry of America, a beautiful quilt of diversity, the best of who we can be. Our respective faiths remind us that the measure of society is how we treat the most vulnerable: the orphan, the widow, the stranger in our midst.

God bless the Members of this House, their families and staff, and all those workers who humbly serve to care for and protect these hallowed Halls.

May these deliberations reflect the best of humanity, honoring the divine spark in one another. “Long may our land be bright, with freedom’s holy light,” as we continue to shine as a beacon of hope to those within our borders and around the world.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day’s proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.