



CENTRAL & EAST EUROPEAN COALITION

comprised of 18 national membership organizations representing more than 20 million Americans who trace their heritage to that part of the world.

American Hungarian Federation

American Latvian Association
in the U.S.

Armenian Assembly of America

Belarusian-American Association

Bulgarian Institute for Research
and Analysis

Congress of Romanian Americans

Washington Chapter Czechoslovak
National Council of America

Estonian American National Council

Georgian Association in the USA

Hungarian American Coalition

Joint Baltic American National
Committee

Lithuanian American Council

Lithuanian American Community

National Federation of American
Hungarians

Polish American Congress

Slovak League of America

Ukrainian Congress Committee
of America

Ukrainian National Association

1612 K Street, NW, Suite 410
Washington, D.C. 20006
www.CEECoalition.org

CEEC POLICY BRIEF

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW

The CEEC staunchly supports democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and recognizes that indispensable elements of democracy in the region include the respect for the rule of law, human rights, minority rights and historical accuracy. These elements are intertwined and especially important in Central and Eastern Europe, considering its history, Soviet domination of the countries in the area and the ethnic, national and religious diversity of the region.

While democracies have emerged and developed in Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of Communism, an autocratic regime still reigns in Belarus and vestiges of intolerance and discrimination against national minorities, including Hungarian minorities, still linger even within some countries that have joined western institutions.

In addition, denial and revisionist history – whether that of Stalin-era atrocities, including the Holodomor in Ukraine, or denial of crimes against humanity, including the Armenian Genocide – undermine the pillars of democracy. Denial, revisionism, human and minority rights abuses and the failure to respect the rule of law also pose serious security challenges which must not be ignored.

Action Needed:

A) Cosponsor H.Res. 252, a human rights bill affirming the Armenian Genocide Resolution, introduced by Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA).

B) Cosponsor H.Con.Res. 267, introduced by Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL) on the 20th anniversary of the re-independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which calls for the continued building of U.S. relationships with these countries.

C) Support human and minority rights in the region.

U.S. ASSISTANCE TO THE REGION

While many countries within Central and Eastern Europe have “graduated” from U.S. assistance programs as provided for under the SEED and FREEDOM Support Acts, U.S. funding should remain a priority for these countries, and at a minimum be maintained at current levels. In addition, the CEEC supports robust funding for the countries of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, and continued assistance funding to support democracy in Belarus.

Exchange programs, a part of public diplomacy, are an acknowledged and successful means of promoting international understanding, good will, and training to citizens of the United States and participating countries. The CEEC strongly supports funding for educational and cultural exchange programs.

Action Needed: Support the Senate FY 2011 mark of \$654 million for the State Department’s educational and cultural exchange programs.

RUSSIA’S UNDUE INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Throughout history, the Russian government has sought to influence the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Attempts in recent history have included both political and military actions, but primarily focus in the form of economic manipulation (e.g., energy transit, trade barriers, and cyber attacks), accusations of alleged maltreatment and discrimination against citizens of Russian descent living in Central and Eastern European countries, and delay in the removal of Russian military forces from the region. In 2008, we saw use of military force against Georgia and de-facto annexation of the breakaway territories, with Russian military in charge.

A pragmatic approach for U.S. foreign policy in countering Russia's attempt in re-establishing its "sphere of influence" in the region should consist of the promotion of democratic principles within the Russian Federation. A democratic, market-based Russia makes for a non-aggressive and peaceful partner in Central and Eastern Europe. The Central and East European Coalition urges that U.S. foreign policy, regarding Russia and its relations with its neighbor nations, be pursued in a forceful and proactive manner.

Action Needed:

A) Join the Congressional Caucus on Central and East Europe co-chaired by Congressmen Daniel Lipinski (D-IL) and Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI).

B) Call on the Administration to utilize all resources to limit Russian pressure on the region.

NATO AND ENERGY SECURITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The CEEC strongly supports pro-active security collaboration of the United States with allies in Central and Eastern Europe through NATO as well as direct bilateral mechanisms. The CEEC played an important role in advocating for the successful enlargement of NATO from the Baltic to the Black Seas. NATO remains a key factor of stability in the region, providing member states with essential elements of political, as well as physical security. Strengthening of the alliance in all aspects should remain a priority.

In addition to NATO, America's policy towards CEE countries must include the facilitation of greater energy security and economic collaboration among the CEE countries, as well as by CEE countries with the producers of energy in the Caspian region and Middle East to ensure successful implementation of the EU's initiative on the Southern Gas Corridor that could lead to enhanced energy sources and economic independence of the CEE nations.

Action Needed:

A) Support the NATO aspirations of the countries of Georgia and Ukraine.

B) Increase FMF and IMET funding for Central and Eastern European countries.

C) Support energy security programs in the region.

VISA ISSUES

The pilot edition of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which allowed six EU countries from Central and Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) to join the VWP in 2008, expired in June 2009, leading to an automatic reinstatement of the standard eligibility rules. These rules include requiring the aspiring country to have less than a 3 percent visa refusal rate in order to be eligible for participation in the Program (as opposed to 10 percent that was set in the Pilot).

These rules have had the unfortunate effect for millions of Americans, mostly of Polish descent, that their relatives still cannot travel freely to the United States, regardless of years of proven, dependable friendship and loyalty to the United States in international affairs and in combat duty. The CEEC believes that it is in the best interest of the United States to have the Visa Waiver Program expanded, especially to countries that have demonstrated a capacity and willingness to cooperate with the United States in achieving counter-terrorism goals.

In addition, the CEEC supports the establishment of a new P visa category to cover groups and individuals coming to the United States for non-commercial cultural purposes at the invitation of a U.S. group with ethnic ties to the invitee's country. This new category includes those coming to present or teach ethnic or folk culture, music, theater, dance, or other ethnic artistic endeavors.

Action Needed:

A) Revise current provisions of the VWP to: 1) increase the visa refusal rate threshold, for example, to 15 percent as previously proposed, and 2) allow the Secretary of Homeland Security the flexibility to include key U.S. allies in the Program.

B) In cooperation with the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security, revise legislation-based guidelines that consular staff use to assess one's purpose for visiting the United States, as well as admission quotas. Guidelines and quotas that are currently used do not reflect today's political and economic realities in Central and Eastern Europe.

C) Ensure that mechanisms for measuring another key VWP eligibility provision, *i.e.*, the overstay rate, are successfully and completely implemented and provide accurate and timely data.

D) Introduce and support legislation to establish a new P visa category.