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nytimes.com

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January 24, 2006

## Georgia Reopens Old Gas Line to Ease Post-Blast Shortage

By C. J. CHIVERS

TBILISI, Georgia, Jan. 23 - Azerbaijan and Russia partly restored the flow of natural gas to Georgia on Monday, using an alternate pipeline to begin easing an energy shortage that developed after saboteurs blew up two Russian pipelines and an electricity transmission line on Sunday. In spite of the renewed flow of gas, much of it sent from Russia through Azerbaijan while technicians worked to repair the machinery, Georgia experienced a day with little heat and scattered electrical blackouts.

Schools and factories closed. At nightfall, as temperatures hovered near freezing, large sections of the capital here fell dark. Many shops sold goods by candlelight, and streets were not lighted.

Georgian officials said it would be at least two days before electricity was fully restored and as long as a week before gas lines returned to normal pressure.

With heat provided to hospitals and electricity available for more than half of households, officials said they had avoided a catastrophe.

Partial gas flow, they said, was restored because of swift help from neighboring Azerbaijan, which agreed to sell Georgia an emergency supply through a long abandoned pipeline that was repaired in 2004 and 2005. The gas, some from Azerbaijani reserves, was mingled with increased flow from Russia, and sent along to Georgia.

The flow from Azerbaijan was switched on Sunday night. By nightfall on Monday, officials expected the pipeline to carry two-thirds of daily requirement of 4.5 million cubic meters for Georgia, said the deputy energy minister, Aleko Khetaguri.

Mr. Khetaguri said, "Hour by hour, the pressure is increasing."

The repaired pipeline, he added, was a remnant of a Soviet network that carried natural gas from Iran through Azerbaijan to Georgia before the 1980's.

Officials appeared visibly pleased and said that whatever the cause of the sabotage, the disruption had been minimized by using the restored pipeline.

"If this had happened one year ago, the whole system would have collapsed," President Mikheil Saakashvili said in an interview.

The cut in Russian gas lines also severed the flow to Armenia, downstream from Georgia in the network. Armenia, however, had fuel reserves and reported fewer problems.

There was no new insight into what caused the four explosions that toppled two power trellises and destroyed two pipelines in southern Russia.

Islamic groups operate in the area, often in collaboration with Chechen separatist fighters and terrorists. Armed irregular formations also operate in Georgia, in the separatist enclave of South Ossetia.

None claimed responsibility for the sabotage, which occurred in wintry mountainous terrain and at widely separated locations, suggesting technical sophistication and an awareness of the workings of the energy system.

President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia ordered the Federal Security Service, the domestic successor to the K.G.B., to increase security at energy complexes in the region and instructed the chief of the country's police to help the investigation, Russian news agencies reported.

Russian officials, who have suggested that militants might have been involved in the sabotage, offered no further suggestion about whom they believed was responsible.

"It would be incorrect to jump to any conclusions before the end of the investigation," Mr. Putin's envoy to the region, Dmitri Kozak, said, according to Interfax.

Mr. Saakashvili, who said Sunday that he suspected that Russia had orchestrated the blasts to put political and economic pressure on Georgia, repeated his remarks on Monday.

"The whole circumstances look very dubious to us," he said, adding that, by his reading of the map, the areas of the explosions are under the control of Russian border guards and are not used by any one insurgent group. He presented no clear evidence, however, of Russian involvement.

Mr. Saakashvili's government also called on Russia to turn over to Georgia two men who it says are members of Russian intelligence services and accuses of organizing sabotage against Georgian power lines in 2004. Russia has refused to hand over the men and seems unlikely to change its position.

Demonstrators gathered outside the Russian Embassy here, carrying anti-Russian placards and an image of Mr. Putin that read "Gasputin," a play on Rasputin.

Although Georgia has broken from Moscow's sphere and pursued a distinctly pro-Western course, some residents expressed dismay at the latest sour turn in relations.

In the Samgori district at the edge of Tbilisi, Ivetta Bakradze, a schoolteacher, sealed off most of her three-room apartment and limited herself to her kitchen. There Ms. Bakradze huddled in the chill, bundled beneath sweaters and a scarf, hoping to preserve the small bit of heat emitted by a single propane burner.

She was less interested in the political exchanges, she said, than in having her utilities restored.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, blackouts and heating shortages had been almost synonymous with Georgia. But this year, the problems had been almost forgotten, Ms. Bakradze said, as widespread repairs and upgrades had made gas and electric service reliable.

The sudden loss of heat was an unwelcome reminder. "We have been seeing Georgia getting revived," she said. "Streets are lighted. The city looks different."

# Post-Soviet Union bloc heading for upheaval

## Turkmenistan pulls out of Commonwealth of Independent States

Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW:** The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the grouping of 12 former Soviet states, has entered a period of upheavals, with one member leaving the bloc, and three other finalising an important trade pact.

Turkmenistan on Friday became the first CIS member-state to pull out of the organisation. Vice Premier Aganiyaz Akyev, who represented Turkmenistan at a CIS summit in Kazan, Russia, announced the decision of President Saparmurat to downgrade Turkmenistan's involve-

ment in CIS from full to associate membership. The despotic Turkmen leader had long threatened to quit the post-Soviet alliance because of frequent criticism from other leaders of his record on human rights.

### Little consequence

Analysts said Turkmenistan's withdrawal would have little consequence for the group as it is not a party to most CIS agreements anyway.

In another major development Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus have finalised a package of trade accords that will create a new closely-knit Common Eco-

nomic Space union within the CIS. This may eventually lead to the break-up of the alliance.

Ukraine, which was ready to sign free trade agreements to continue getting cheap Russian oil and gas, but refused to join a customs union, was left out in the cold as the other members declined to split the agreed package.

A senior Kremlin official said earlier this week that Russia was planning a radical change of its policy towards the ex-Soviet states under which it does not receive economic nor political benefits for selling oil and gas at a discount.



# Russia, US in Belarus clash

**Vilnius (Lithuania), April 21** (Reuters): Russia and the US clashed on Belarus today as Moscow's foreign minister rebuffed a call by the US secretary of state for change in what she branded central Europe's "last true dictatorship."

"We would not of course advocate what some people call 'regime change' anywhere," Sergei Lavrov said at a meeting between Nato and Russia in the Lithuanian capital.

He was responding to remarks by US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice yesterday that Lukashenko ran "the last true dictatorship in the centre of Europe," and that "it's time for change to come to Belarus."

Rice retaliated by meeting Belarussian Opposition leaders in a show of support for pro-democracy groups in the ex-Soviet state despite Russian concerns that the US was interfering in its traditional sphere of influence.

"While it may seem difficult and long, at times even far away, there will be a road to democracy in Belarus," she told them.

The Opposition leaders, among them the wife of a journalist who "disappeared" and the head of a university that has been shut down, told a Vil-

nius news conference they wanted to hold mass street protests and would boycott elections they believed Lukashenko would rig.

Rice said yesterday there was nothing wrong with Washington supporting pro-democracy groups — as it did last year during Ukraine's "Orange revolution" — if it led to Belarussians throwing off the "yoke of tyranny."

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana agreed with Rice's call for change.

# Russia, US clash over Belarus

Reuters  
Vilnius, April 21

RUSSIA AND the US clashed on Belarus on Thursday as Moscow's foreign minister rebuffed a call by the US secretary of state for change in what she branded central Europe's "last true dictatorship."

"I think the democratic process and the process of reform cannot be imposed from outside," Sergei Lavrov said of Belarus at a news conference in the Lithuanian capital during a meeting between NATO and Russia. "We would not of course advocate what some people call 'regime change' anywhere," he said, reacting to US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice's remark on Wednesday that Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko ran "the last true dictatorship in the centre of Europe," and that it was time for change.

But Rice insisted the US had a role to play in bringing democracy to former Soviet Belarus, and urged the world to monitor closely presidential elections there in 2006.

"The 2006 elections really do present an excellent opportunity for the international community to focus on the need for free and fair elections in Belarus," she told a news conference after Lavrov had made his comments. "Elections have been an important catalyst in any number of countries now around the world," she added. In the former Soviet Union alone, governments have been thrown out after rigging polls in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in recent months.

She said Washington would not intervene directly in Belarus but could and should "shine a spotlight on places where people are still denied freedom."

"We can put that on the international agenda. We can insist on certain standards of behaviour by any government, any place in the world, including standards of behaviour when it comes to the holding of elections," she said.

Rice earlier met Belarussian opposition leaders in a show of support for pro-democracy groups despite Russian concerns that



Rice and other Nato foreign ministers with Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, left, in Vilnius on Thursday.

Washington was interfering in its "near abroad".

The opposition leaders, among them the wife of a journalist who "disappeared" and the head of a university that has been shut down, told a Vilnius news conference they wanted to hold mass street protests and would boycott elections they believed Lukashenko would rig.

Rice said on Wednesday there was nothing wrong

with Washington supporting pro-democracy groups — as it did last year during Ukraine's Orange revolution which helped create a pro-Western government — if it led to Belarussians throwing off the "yoke of tyranny."

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana agreed with Rice's call for change. "There is no doubt that the time has come for change, I have said that many, many, many years ago," he said.

22 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Putin, Yushchenko vow to deepen ties

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MARCH 20.** The leaders of Russia and Ukraine vowed to deepen strategic partnership between the two biggest post-Soviet states during the President, Vladimir Putin's first visit to Kiev to mend fences after the pro-Western "orange revolution" in Ukraine last year.

The Ukrainian President, Viktor Yushchenko, promised that his commitment to a long-term goal of joining the European Union would not lead to a weakening of ties with Russia.

"We have reached full agreement on deepening strategic partnership between Ukraine and Russia," he said at a joint press conference with Mr. Putin after their talks in Kiev late on Saturday. "We will never regard Ukraine's European option as an alternative to cooperation with the Russian Federation. Russia is our eternal neighbour which Uk-

raine wants to see as its friend and strategic partner."

Mr. Putin described Ukraine and Russia as "the closest and truly strategic partners in the full meaning of this word."

It was the second meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian leaders after Mr. Yushchenko defeated his Moscow-backed rival, Viktor Yanukovich, in a bitter three-round presidential poll at the end of last year that was heavily influenced by West-orchestrated "orange revolution" protests.

## Commission soon

They agreed to set up a "Putin-Yushchenko commission" to streamline bilateral ties, to finalise an international consortium to upgrade a pipeline that carries 80 per cent of Russian natural gas exports to Europe across Ukraine and define the format for Ukraine's participation in the Moscow-promoted United Economic Space designed to integrate the

economies of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Ukraine wants to limit its involvement in the multi-nation economic pact to a free-trade zone. This will give Ukraine continued access to cheap Russia oil and gas, and allow it to boost exports of Ukrainian energy-intensive steel and fertilizers to Russia to reduce a \$6-billion trade deficit in the \$17-billion bilateral trade.

Mr. Putin, however, said Moscow linked preferential trade arrangements for Ukraine with its deeper involvement in the United Economic Space pact, which also envisions a customs union, as well as a common tax, monetary and foreign trade policy. "The expansion of bilateral cooperation will depend to a large extent on progress in the formation of the United Economic Space," he said at the press conference in Kiev. The two leaders agreed to write a roadmap plan identifying priority issues for bilateral ties in 2005.

THE HINDU

21 MAR 2005

# Gas poisoning kills Georgia PM

**Tbilisi (Georgia), Feb. 3** (Reuters): The Prime Minister of ex-Soviet Georgia was found dead today in a bizarre gas poisoning that robs the inexperienced President, Mikhail Saakashvili, of a steady hand to help run his turbulent country.

Zurab Zhvania's bodyguards found the 41-year-old slumped in an armchair near a gas heater at a friend's apartment, said interior minister Vano Merabishvili. "This is a tragic accident... It was a gas poisoning," he said.

Saakashvili called ministers to an emergency meeting to discuss the death of one of

the few political heavyweights in a leadership catapulted to power by a popular uprising a year ago.

Vice-premier Georgy Baramidze, a close ally of Zhvania's, was likely to chair cabinet meetings until a new Prime Minister is named. But he is not thought to be in the frame for the job and there is no obvious successor.

"(Zhvania's death) is a huge blow for our country and personally for me as a president and as a person," a red-eyed Saakashvili told his ministers, many of them dressed in black, his own voice breaking with emotion.

"I have lost my closest friend, my most loyal adviser, my biggest ally"

Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose relations with Georgia's leadership have often been fraught, sent his condolences, the Kremlin press service said.

Zhvania's body was found at 0130 GMT when his guards worried that he was not answering his mobile phone, broke down the door of the friend's apartment, said Merabishvili.

The friend, a middle-ranking official, also died.

A police forensic expert said an initial examination of

Zhvania's body revealed no evidence of foul play. Gas poisoning is common in Georgia, mainly caused by the heaters run off gas canisters that people use in winter, when power supplies are erratic.

The Prime Minister was one of a trio of leaders who spearheaded the "Rose Revolution" in late 2003 that toppled veteran leader Eduard Shevardnadze and set Georgia on a pro-western reform path.

The state of about 5 million lies in the Caucasus mountains, on the transit route for oil and gas exports from the Caspian Sea to the West, and is racked by simmering conflicts

over the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Zhvania was widely seen as a moderating influence on Saakashvili, a 37-year-old US-trained lawyer who is prone to emotional outbursts and provoking confrontation. There were widespread reports of rivalry between the two men but they never aired this in public.

On occasions when Saakashvili's relations with Moscow or separatist regimes broke down, Zhvania was able to act as a go-between. He was also an able back-room organiser in a cabinet with little experience of the machinery of government.

## PREMIER FACTS



- Born on December 9, 1963, in Tbilisi, Georgia
- Played key role in protests that led to the ouster of Eduard Shevardnadze in November 2003
- Appointed as PM by President Saakashvili in November 2004
- Considered a moderating counterbalance to the fiery Saakashvili



25 JAN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Yushchenko selects anti-Kremlin PM

Associated Press  
Moscow, January 24

UKRAINE PRESIDENT Viktor Yushchenko, visiting Moscow on a trip to mend relations after a bitter election campaign, appointed top ally Yulia Tymoshenko as Prime Minister on Monday — a move likely to anger the Kremlin.

Yushchenko, who was inaugurated on Sunday, initially said he would need more consultations before nominating a Prime Minister. His hesitation seemed to be

aimed at avoiding a provocative decision just before his Moscow trip — his first foreign visit as President.

But after arriving in the Russian capital, Yushchenko's office said he had nominated Tymoshenko, who is widely disliked by the Kremlin. Moscow supported Yushchenko's opponent in the presidential campaign, former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych.

Tymoshenko, a firebrand opposition leader, was a key driving force behind a wave of opposition

protests dubbed the "Orange Revolution" that paved the way for Yushchenko's victory.

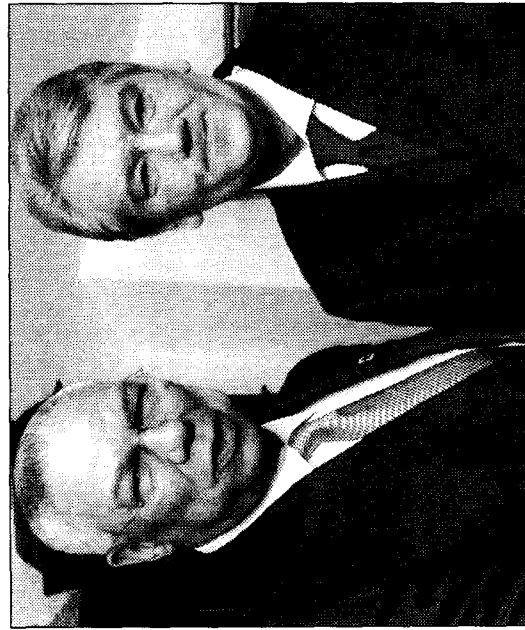
For Yushchenko, the Kremlin meeting was part of his delicate balancing act to move closer to the West while not upsetting relations with his powerful neighbor. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, the meeting could help undo the damage of his unsuccessful foray into Ukrainian politics. Yushchenko told Putin that "Russia is our eternal strategic partner".



Yulia Tymoshenko

# American toehold in Orange Revolution

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Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko (right) with US secretary of state Colin Powell in Kiev. (AFP)

**Kiev, Jan. 23** (Reuters): Viktor Yushchenko became Ukraine's President today, crowning a peaceful revolt by ordinary people that overcame a rigged election, thwarted Russia's bid to influence the vote and pointed the country decisively westward.

Watched by US secretary of state Colin Powell and only minor dignitaries from Russia, Yushchenko — his face pockmarked by poison administered to slow his rise to power — took the oath of office to cap his two-month Orange Revolution.

"The people achieved honest elections, the transfer of power was legitimate," Yushchenko, a 50-year-old former central bank governor, told parliament after taking the

oath. "We have a single aim — a democratic and prosperous Ukraine."

Aware of the turning point reached in his country's history, Yushchenko told Powell he was happy "that I have lived to the time when the Ukrainian President is elected not in Moscow, not in Washington, but in Ukraine".

Yushchenko, a former Prime Minister, wants to eradicate corruption and build a country with a transparent economy and institutions to join the European mainstream. Ukraine is sandwiched between Russia and the 25-nation European Union.

Crowds gathered in Independence Square, its buildings bedecked in Yushchenko's orange campaign colours,

trademark of the revolution that propelled him to power.

Presidents of at least seven countries were due to attend the inauguration, including Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia and Latvia — all formerly communist states now committed to European integration.

Yushchenko wants an end to divisions between Ukraine's nationalist western regions and the Russian-speaking east that had been accentuated by the election. Tomorrow he will fulfil a promise to make Moscow his first foreign destination by meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin.

His programme this week also includes visits to the Council of Europe, a major rights body, the European Par-

liament, the World Economic Forum in Switzerland and commemorations in Poland of the Soviet army's liberation of the Auschwitz death camp.

"I want to assure you that you will continue to enjoy the full support of the American government and the American people as you move forward to undertake the efforts that the Ukrainian people are expecting," Powell told Yushchenko after their talks.

He said the meeting dealt with "activation of Ukrainian efforts toward international integration. This includes the prospects for Ukraine acquiring a market-based economy."

That, he said, was critical for Ukraine joining the World Trade Organisation.

"This would not have hap-

pened if we didn't have partners that are advocating democratic principles and shared democratic values. And I certainly include in this list the United States of America and your personal contribution."

Yushchenko, his face disfigured from dioxin poisoning he blames on secret services, was elected in a race dominated by mass protests against fraud in a first ballot that he lost. The Supreme Court ordered a second vote which he won comfortably.

Powell, due to step down as secretary of state, made his offer of help after a telephone call to Yushchenko by President George W. Bush yesterday in which the new Ukrainian leader was invited to

Washington.

# Tables turned

Orange has triumphed in Ukraine

Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich is a very bad loser. Despite losing to opponent Viktor Yushchenko by 2.3 million votes, in Ukrainian presidential elections seen as fair by international observers, he attempted to hold a meeting of government ministers as if nothing had changed, but was prevented from doing so by Yushchenko's supporters. He filed complaints alleging electoral fraud running to 27 volumes, which were rejected by the Election Commission and thereafter by the Supreme Court. He nevertheless refuses to concede defeat. His principal backers, Moscow and erstwhile President Leonid Kuchma, aren't supporting his claims. Kuchma and Yanukovich have held the political reins in the post-Soviet era, but their rule has been marred by mis-governance, corruption, and rigging of elections. The Ukraine economy has huge potential as it has a large middle class and among the most educated populations in the erstwhile Soviet Union. But the erstwhile *nomenklatura* mutated into oligarchic business clans who picked up state-held companies at throwaway prices, while at the other end of the social spectrum millions languished in poverty. While Yanukovich wanted to integrate Ukraine with Russia, Yushchenko favours the opposite solution: integration into the economic and security structures of Europe.

For President Putin, the choice of whom to support must have been obvious — on the one hand, the prospect of partially reversing the disintegration of the USSR by bringing the Ukraine into Russia's sphere of influence; on the other, that of having NATO on his doorstep. In retrospect he may be regretting jumping in too quickly, as he openly supported Yanukovich's campaign and congratulated him immediately after he declared victory in the discredited November poll. He didn't anticipate the "orange revolution" the poll malpractices would trigger, and Ukraine has now blown up on his face. The fundamental issue here is what kind of post-Soviet future countries that had been in the Soviet orbit are going to have. The options are either the kind of liberal democracy that Poland or the Czech republic have become, or the rightwing authoritarian state dominated by oligarchs and mafias that Turkmenistan is, and Russia, leaning towards the Ukraine has chosen, but it remains up to Yushchenko to make it stick. He must not forget either that 44 per cent of the country voted for Yanukovich, and that Ukraine remains dependent for gas and energy supplies on Russia and other Central Asian republics.

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## UKRAINIAN DRAMA

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VIKTOR YANUKOVICH'S DECISION to resign as the Prime Minister of Ukraine after his defeat in the repeat presidential election brings the political uncertainty in the former Soviet republic a step closer to resolution. Mr. Yanukovich disputes the outcome of the court-ordered re-vote that he appears to have lost to his rival, Viktor Yushchenko. His legal challenge means the country's Election Commission cannot yet officially declare results. Earlier, it seemed as if Ukraine was set for prolonged political confrontation with Mr. Yanukovich vowing to continue as Prime Minister despite losing the vote count. By relinquishing office, he has decidedly brought down the political temperature in Kiev. His resignation signifies that he is beginning to concede defeat, even though he has made it known that he will continue all efforts to overturn the results. But it is clear that even Mr. Yanukovich does not expect this will happen. Instead, the former Prime Minister can be expected to seek a revival of his political fortunes in the next parliamentary election, which is scheduled for 2006. Considering that he won nearly 48 per cent of the vote in this presidential election, four percentage points less than his opponent, he is well placed for the parliamentary contest, as of now.

Several challenges await Mr. Yushchenko, the presumptive President-elect. The most important is to repair relations with Russia, on which Ukraine is dependent for most of its oil and gas import and for export of its industrial goods and agricultural produce. Moscow sees him as a pro-West politician whose aspirations for Ukraine include membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union. Although Mr. Yushchenko has made no secret of his leanings — a new Ministry of European Integration is one of his stated plans — he knows that the country's economic survival is dependent on good relations with the immediate East. This is

why, despite all the anti-Moscow rhetoric emerging from his camp during the election, he has declared that his first visit abroad after assuming office will be to Russia. The other challenge would be to pull together a nation of 48 million people badly divided by the election. While the industrial west and north backed Mr. Yushchenko, the agricultural south and east, which have more ethnic and religious links with Russia, were solidly behind Mr. Yanukovich. These areas even threatened to secede and form an autonomous region should his opponent become President. It will be difficult for Mr. Yushchenko to provide effective leadership to the country without winning the support of these regions.

The drama in Ukraine, which began with the first presidential election on November 21 won by Mr. Yanukovich, allegedly through fraudulent means, and ended for now with the re-vote, clearly shows the desire of the United States to build spheres of influence in Russia's neighbourhood with the aim of containing an independent-minded Moscow. While the Russian President Vladimir Putin, has joined hands with the Bush administration in the war against terror, Moscow has on several occasions voiced protest against U.S. domination. It is public knowledge that the "orange revolution," as the political change in Ukraine is described, was funded in large part by U.S.-based organisations. With parliamentary elections coming up in two more former Soviet states — Kyrgyzstan and Moldova — Mr. Putin is justified in warning the U.S. against further attempts to isolate his country through similar "revolutions" in the region. Elections are best left to the people of the country in which they are held. Outside interventions in a region that is home to people of diverse ethnicities and religious affiliations, as Mr. Putin has rightly warned, carry the risk of plunging it into "endless conflict".