

Washington, DC (UNIS) – As the summit between Presidents Obama and Medvedev draw near, many in Washington have begun to weigh-in on the deliberations and predict the upcoming discussions. As early as two weeks ago on June 10, 2009, the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) of which the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) is an active member, hosted a policy seminar on Capitol Hill entitled “Security in Central and Eastern Europe on the Eve of the Obama/Medvedev Summit.” The guest speaker included Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) who, during his opening remarks, insisted that the United States “must reject the idea that the independent nations near Russia’s borders constitute any form of bargaining chip, to be traded away in pursuit of better ties with Moscow.” The policy seminar raised important issues for consideration before President Obama meets with Russian leadership in July, and reflected the view of the CEEC that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are an important part of U.S. security interests and need continued U.S. attention and support.

Since then, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing on Wednesday, June 24, 2009 regarding the upcoming Summit, entitled: “The July Summit and Beyond: Prospects for U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Reductions,” with witnesses including the Honorable William Perry, former Secretary of Defense; The Honorable Thomas Graham, former Special Adviser to the President for Arms Control; and, Dr. Keith Payne, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Forces Policy. Each witness provided testimony expressing their opinion about general U.S.-Russia relations, and more specifically as it pertains to nuclear arms reduction. The former Secretary of Defense spoke of the need for a new START agreement with the Russians, but clarified that it should be kept simple and modest especially in light of more controversial issues between the two countries – i.e. missile defense shield in East Europe. Of poignant interest were remarks by Thomas Graham. During his testimony, Mr. Graham noted that the United States should “try to see the world view through their [Russian]” perspective. He went on further to explain his theory that the Russian government is not interested in re-defining a new START treaty because they are concerned about NATO expansion [to Ukraine and Georgia] and missile defense shield in Eastern Europe.

Nearly two-dozen Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee participated in the hearing and asked relevant questions. The Chairman of the Committee, Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA), began a line of congressional questioning regarding the urgency of a new START treaty [the START treaty is set to expire at the end of 2009, op.cit.]. Secretary Perry’s response indicated that the development of a new strategic relationship with Russia was critical in undertaking new initiatives such as START and would aid in our concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear issue.

A relevant line of questioning from Rep. Bob Inglis (R-SC) attempted to ascertain from the

witnesses why the Russian government does not want the United States to develop a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe. Answering first, Mr. Graham noted that the Russians want parity with the United States and see missile defense as a threat to their strategic forces, whereby Mr. Payne eloquently stated that Russian “pride” and their loss of “paternity over former Soviet allies” has them behaving the way they do.

Rep. William Delahunt (D-MA) raised a few questions regarding a “litany of complaints from Moscow” about continued NATO expansion as it is “knocking on their [Russian] door” and how the Russians “lost the PR battle” in its military invasion of Georgia. In answer to the congressman’s questioning, Mr. Graham clearly stated that in his view, “NATO expansion is controversial and grew out of the fact that Russia was weak in the 1990’s...and to bring Ukraine into NATO strikes at the heart” of Russian frustration. He continued to opine that “we [the West/United States] shouldn’t go any further” in regards to NATO expansion.

In keeping with the tone of questioning provided by Rep. Delahunt, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) spoke of a “renewed belligerence between our two countries [United States and Russia]” over issues such as the continued expansion of the NATO alliance. Whereas, Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX) questioned the witnesses to seek their opinion if the “expansion of NATO is good or bad.” In the humble opinion of Mr. Graham, NATO expansion was not a positive step and “inevitably lead to conflict with Russia,” continuing to emphasize that though the countries of Central and East Europe are important, there could have been other security guarantees offered to them instead. In concluding his remarks, Mr. Graham mentioned, “what’s done is done, but no further [NATO] expansion.”

The full text of the Chairman’s remarks and the Ranking Member are included on the House Foreign Affairs website at <http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/> . Should anyone have any further questions regarding the proceedings, please feel free to contact the Ukrainian National Information Service (UNIS) at 202 547-0018 or by e-mail at [unis@ucca.org](mailto:unis@ucca.org)