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## RUSSIAN PASSPORTS AS MOSCOW'S GEOPOLITICAL TOOL

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The official protest by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on September 11 over the allegedly “unfriendly” attitudes of the Ukrainian authorities to Russia was met by a stern response on the same day by Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry ([www.mfa.gov.ua](http://www.mfa.gov.ua)). Russia’s MFA protested about President Viktor Yushchenko’s support for Georgia, including supplying “heavy military hardware”; Ukraine’s drive to join NATO “against the will of the Ukrainian people”; “attempts by the Ukrainian authorities to reconsider our common history in an anti-Russian spirit”; and the standard complaint about official hostility to the Russian language.

Ukraine’s response pointed to Russia’s inability, despite nearly two decades of Ukrainian independence, to accept Ukraine as an “independent state.” Ukraine’s MFA also described Ukraine as “under no circumstances belonging to the so-called ‘privileged interests’ of any country.”

The Russian protest also complained about the “practice of banning Russian deputies and eminent politicians from entering Ukraine.” The following day Russian Duma deputy Viktor Vodolatsky was refused entry into Ukraine to attend a coordinating council meeting of Cossack Hetmans (leaders) from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Moldova’s Trans-Dniestr region. The week before, Russian political technologist Sergei Markov was refused entry into Ukraine.

Russia has retaliated by creating a long list of Ukrainian politicians and businessmen banned from entering Russia. It includes the head of NUNS Vyacheslav Kyrylenko, Petro Yushchenko (the president’s brother and a NUNS deputy), the governors of

Kyiv and Kharkiv, BYuT head of the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs, heads of the armaments company Ukrspetsexport, and others (www.korrespondent.com.ua, September 15).

Ukraine's MFA warned "that attempts by Russia to destabilize the situation in Ukraine through fifth columnists who for some reason position themselves as the 'healthy political forces of the country' have no prospects." The accusations and the very tone of the exchange are at odds with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's assurances that "Crimea is not disputable territory" (German ARD television, August 29).

Leon Aron of the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute warned in The Wall Street Journal (September 10) that "Russia's Next Target Could Be Ukraine." The Moscow city council is providing \$34 million in support of "compatriots" abroad.

Aron warns of a scenario in which Russia takes control over-night of the port of Sevastopol, which might be "impossible to reverse without a large-scale war." The EU's unwillingness to deal with Russia's new assertiveness since August 8 has demonstrated the vacuous nature of its European Common Foreign and Security Policy. If the EU has permitted Russia to get away with de facto annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, why would it react any differently to a Russian annexation of the Crimea?

The September 9 EU-Ukraine summit threw "away a golden opportunity to stabilize [Ukraine's] eastern frontier and encourage political and economic reform in Kiev" (Financial Times, September 10). The EU "foolishly ducked a chance to throw the country a political and economic lifeline" (The Economist, September 11).

Two arguments why West European states, such as Germany, Italy, and France, have not supported NATO or EU enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia do not stand up. First, Germany, Italy, and France do not support either NATO or EU enlargement, although it is only the former that is usually considered likely to "antagonize" Russia. Second, energy links to Russia are not a factor in appeasing Russia. France, Italy, and Germany are only reliant for 26 percent, 30 percent, and 39 percent, respectively, of their gas imports from Russia. Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, which support NATO and EU enlargement to Ukraine, import respectively 61 percent, 84 percent, 94 percent, and 100 percent of their gas from Russia.

Ukrainian authorities have become highly sensitive to the threat of a Russian policy of destabilization since the Kremlin invasion of Georgia. One particular area of concern is the issuing of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens in the light of Russia's pretext of coming to the "defense" of Russian citizens in the two frozen conflicts where Russia had illegally distributed passports.

Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Volodymyr Ohryzko said that Ukraine's repeated protests to the Russian consulate in Simferopol over its distributing of passports continue to be ignored. Ohryzko announced that the Security Service, prosecutor's office, Interior Ministry, and MFA were now investigating the problem ([www.mfa.gov.ua](http://www.mfa.gov.ua), September 6). Ukraine's Ambassador to Slovakia Inna Ohnivets, who previously worked on this issue, told of repeated Ukrainian demands to the Russian Consulate in the Crimea to halt the practice ([www.bbc.co.uk/Ukrainian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/Ukrainian), August 28).

A week after Ohryzko's comments, 34 inhabitants of Sevastopol who maintain dual citizenship had their Ukrainian citizenship withdrawn. Further investigations have located 1,595 inhabitants of Sevastopol, primarily serving on the Black Sea Fleet, who have dual citizenship, which is banned by Ukrainian law ([www.pravda.com.ua](http://www.pravda.com.ua), September 13).

Both political forces in the Orange coalition have raised the issue of the distribution of Russian passports as a threat to Ukrainian security. Our Ukraine-Self Defense deputy Volodymyr Stretovych warned that increasing the number of Russian citizens in the Crimea would give Russia, as in Georgia, a pretext to come to the "defense" of its citizens ([www.nuns.com.ua](http://www.nuns.com.ua), August 13, 15). Deputy Nuns faction leader Borys Tarasiuk described the distribution of passports as Russia's "secret aggression against Ukrainian citizens." Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc deputies have drawn up a draft law making the obtaining of dual citizenship a criminal offence ([www.pravda.com.ua](http://www.pravda.com.ua), September 9).

The problem Ukrainian authorities are faced with is that they do not have concrete data on the number of Russian passports distributed in the Crimea. During Leonid Kuchma's decade in office from 1994 to 2004 the Ukrainian authorities turned a blind eye to the illegal practice. Estimates of the number of Russian passport holders in the Crimea range from a low of 6,000 (Newsweek, August 23) to 100,000 (Los Angeles Times, August 25).

Consequently, the EU is ignoring the fact that the consequences for European security of Russian destabilization in the Crimea would be far more severe than that of Russia's invasion of Georgia.