

# COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

58 EAST 68TH STREET • NEW YORK • NEW YORK 10021  
Tel 212 434 9400 Fax 212 434 9800 [www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org)

Independent Task Force on  
U.S. Policy toward Russia

November 15, 2005

John Edwards  
*Co-Chair*

Jack Kemp  
*Co-Chair*

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Last spring the Council on Foreign Relations asked the two of us to serve as co-chairs of an independent task force on U.S. policy toward Russia. The group has met several times over the past six months and is preparing a report to be issued early next year. As sometimes happens in the course of such a broad review, an individual issue emerges that is so timely – and about which task force members feel so strongly – that the co-chairs decide to make early contact with policymakers to express their views. We are writing you now on just such a question – a disturbing new challenge to the ability of Russian non-governmental organizations to cooperate with, and draw support from counterparts in the United States and elsewhere. We believe this issue urgently needs discussion when you meet with President Putin this week.

As you may know, members of President Putin's party and other fractions of the State Duma introduced legislation last week that would, among other things, keep foreign NGO's from maintaining "representative offices" or branches in Russia and deny foreign funds to Russian organizations that engage in (undefined) "political" activities. Virtually the entire non-profit sector – from human-rights monitors to policy think-tanks, even public-health alliances – is likely to be affected.

The impact of this measure, if it became law, should be obvious: it would roll back pluralism in Russia and curtail contact between our societies. It would mark a complete breach of the commitment to strengthen such contact that President Putin made when you and he met in Bratislava on February 24, 2005. And it raises an almost unthinkable prospect – that the president of Russia might serve as chairman of the G-8 at the same time that laws come into force in his country to choke off contacts with global society.

This piece of legislation is all the more disturbing to us because it does not come out of nowhere. It is part of the clear negative pattern of growing state control over society, about which you and Secretary Rice have properly raised America's concern. The creation of modern political, social, and economic

The Honorable George W. Bush  
November 15, 2005  
Page Two

institutions in Russia is a truly historic process, and both countries will be the losers if it is cut short.

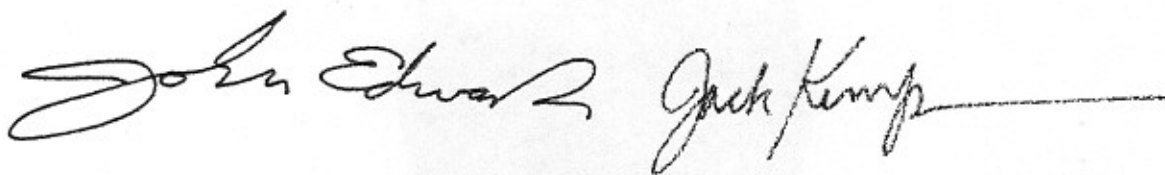
Russian officials and legislators are, of course, likely to insist that they are doing no more than blocking political interference in their internal affairs. Even with its unsettling echoes of Soviet times, we recognize this as a legitimate interest. But if the only issue were how to protect the integrity of Russia's electoral process and political campaigns, the problem would be easily solved. Other countries, including our own, do so without encroaching on fundamental freedoms.

The aim of the proposed legislation, to judge by the way its sponsors talk about it, is clearly far broader. Senior Russian officials have described their own NGO's as a "fifth column" in Russian society and even as fronts for foreign intelligence services. If this proposal comes into force, the government will clearly have in its hands the authority to close down public organizations simply because it finds their views and activities inconvenient.

Mr. President, Russia faces a choice between putting itself in the mainstream of the modern world or getting trapped in an eddy of reaction and isolation. For those of us – and here we can confidently include all members of our task force – who support the goal of Russian-American partnership, the legislation that the Duma is considering represents a very serious warning about how that choice is being made.

We hope you will use your meeting with President Putin to discuss this matter in the frankest possible terms.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is "John Edwards" and the signature on the right is "Jack Kemp". Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.