

Focus on Ex-Western Leaders Working for Despots

By [George Jahn](#)

March 04, 2011



Schröder, right, is appearing too close for some to Gazprom chief Alexei Miller and President Dmitry Medvedev. **Dmitry Lovetsky**

VIENNA — One is in the pay of Kazakhstan's autocrat. Another endorsed elections held by the man dubbed Europe's last dictator. A third contradicted his own president by declaring that Egypt's Hosni Mubarak should stay in power.

What these men have in common: They have all been leaders or senior officials in Western governments sharply critical of the regimes they or their associates now represent.

As leaders in Europe and the United States adopt sanctions against Libya's Gadhafi clan and pledge support to Mideast pro-democracy movements, such potential conflicts of interest are coming under increasing scrutiny.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has rejected criticism that Britain was too cozy with

Moammar Gadhafi while he was in office, arguing that London had a moderating influence. And his office has denied unsubstantiated claims from a Gadhafi son who says that Blair advised the Libyan Investment Authority after stepping down.

But other past leaders and officials work for foreign interests that they may have frowned upon while in office.

In Austria, ex-Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer works as a consultant for Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, while former Vice Chancellor Hubert Gorbach, on a recent trip to Belarus sponsored by its government, praised elections there as "up to West European standards."

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko is widely reviled as a chronic human rights abuser, and often described as "Europe's last dictator."

But Gorbach is not alone among former senior European officials to praise Lukashenko. Poland's Andrzej Lepper, a former deputy prime minister now facilitating business contacts between Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, calls the Belarus elections "in accordance with the principles of democracy."

Germany's Gerhard Schroeder is the most prominent example of public outcry over foreign lobbying work.

Schroeder moved almost seamlessly from the chancellorship six years ago to the leadership positions he now holds in firms linked to Russia's state-owned Gazprom, whose energy chokehold on parts of Europe contributed to gas shortages on the continent twice in the past decade.

While chancellor, Schroeder championed the Kremlin's Nord Stream pipeline project, meant to supply Russian gas directly to Germany and secured government backing for the deal. A few months later, he became head of the project's shareholder committee with the support of Gazprom — the Russian gas consortium whose dispute with transit country Ukraine caused serious gas shortages in Europe in 2006 and 2009.

The press and public expressed outrage — but Schroeder held onto his lucrative posts.

Across the Atlantic, comments by retired diplomat Frank Wisner after completing a U.S. government mission to persuade Mubarak to step down raise questions about past and present loyalties.

President Obama already was urging Mubarak to resign when Wisner stunned administration officials by publicly saying the Egyptian president's continued leadership was critical. The administration was forced to distance itself from Wisner and point out that he is a private citizen who stopped representing the government when he left Cairo.

The fact that Wisner's law firm had worked for the Egyptian government was revealed only later and left Wisner's image skewed — despite assurances by the firm's head that Wisner never directly worked for Egyptian interests.

Most officials-turned-lobbyists working for foreign governments or causes do so legally.

Where local laws call for it, they register with authorities, comply with "cooling-off periods" between government jobs and consultancies and meet other formal requirements.

Still, in Western nations, the idea of former government officials moving to serve clients that may not share democratic values raises questions. Are they betraying their nation's principles? Are some in public service in the first place for the benefits they anticipate once in the private sector?

"If people anticipate that they can earn some kind of significant windfall once out of office while currying favor with power groups while in office, there are potentials for abuse," says Stephen Walt, a Harvard professor of international affairs.

Generally he says, former government officials who turn to representing foreign countries, companies and political parties open themselves up to "potential for conflicts of interest."

Walt says situations where former government officials use credentials to argue the position of a foreign government without disclosing they are in its employ are always problematic.

"Someone engaged in lobbying or political commentary ought to simply disclose where the outside income come from," he says. "At a minimum, people can discount anything that they might say."

In widely read op-ed commentaries, William Montgomery, the former U.S. ambassador to many of Yugoslavia's former republics, proposes that Kosovo and Bosnia be allowed to split into its ethnic components — a stance fiercely opposed both by Washington and most European capitals.

Montgomery is working for the Serbian Progressive Party — Serbian nationalists that include supporters of former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic and who demand that Serbs in Kosovo and Bosnia be allowed to secede. A document deposited with the U.S. Department of Justice last year shows him as registered as a foreign agent by party leader Tomislav Nikolic. But that is not apparent in his role as newspaper contributor.

"I don't ever want to be in a position where I am explaining the party's policies ... that's not my role," Montgomery told The Associated Press when asked about his activities. The former special presidential adviser on Bosnia refused additional comment.

In Austria, both Gorbach and Gusenbauer told the AP that they dispute suggestions in national media that they have sold out in working for — and praising — autocrats whose commitment to democracy and human rights records are abysmal.

Lukashenko has been in power for more than 16 years, exercising overwhelming control over politics, industry and media in his nation of 10 million. But Gorbach, whose consulting company is seeking to expand in Belarus and other former Soviet republics, questions findings by international observers that Lukashenko's December re-election was rigged, declaring that what he saw at polling stations on election night showed the nation "progressing toward accepting the basic rules of democracy."

And while condemning "violence in all of its forms," Gorbach — who was the guest of the Belarus government as an election observer — said he spent post-election hours in his hotel

room and saw and heard nothing of the brutal police crackdown on demonstrators protesting the vote. "What I observed was all above board," he declares.

Gusenbauer, meanwhile, suggests he is doing Western society a service by promoting democracy and importing Western values through his paid consulting tasks for Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's president for life.

He said some people stand on the sidelines and wring their hands over lack of freedoms, while others jump in and try to change things for the better.

"I definitely belong to the second group," he said.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/03/04/focus-on-ex-western-leaders-working-for-despots-a5430>