



— PLOUGHSHARES FUND —

***Meeting of the SuPR (Sustainable Partnership with Russia) Group***

*February 1-3, 2011*

*Arc-en-Ciel, Gstaad, Switzerland*

**MEDIA AND RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES**

*A Policy Memo*

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Needless to say that atmosphere of tolerance and understanding is vital for the course of strengthening relations between Russia and the United States. And one of the key factors in creating this kind of atmosphere is media.

However, both Russian and American media is not up to the mark. I don't speak about criticism – Russia sometimes deserves not only criticism but even condemnation, but generally its image in American media is distorted. I mean it is much worse, than Russia really is. Being a journalist myself I can say, that it's more or less understandable. The stereotypes of the cold war era are still alive and they make Western public expect bad news from Russia. As for the journalists they just supply the public with what it wants to read and see. As a result when an average Westerner comes to Russia he expects to find there a country resembling Haiti of Father Doc times. And then gets a surprise of his life, realizing that Russian reality is quite different from what he thought about it.

Almost the same applies to Russian media, especially the main TV channels. Sometimes they are disgustingly anti-American or at least tend to see the United States as a country which is hostile to Russia and constantly scheming against it. And again it's just what quite a considerable part of Russian public wants to know about America. I can judge it by my own experience. The articles in the *Kommersant* dealing

with differences, disputes and frictions between the USA and Russia are extremely popular with our readers.

My firm conviction is that something should be done to change the situation and it is Kremlin and the US administration that can do much to improve the image of America in Russia and that of Russia in the United States. It doesn't mean that the governments will have to ask journalists working in the mainstream media to hide facts or to misinform public, but just to persuade them to be more tolerant and understanding. And, certainly, this question should be discussed at a high by the two sides to reach a kind of verbal agreement.