



# Mike woos Russian vote

## Cites family heritage in new push

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SEVERAL MONTHS ago, Mayor Bloomberg proclaimed himself the "Russian mayor" at a civic forum on Brighton Beach.

After all, his grandparents emigrated here from Russia, he says. Now with the election just days away, Bloomberg is turning to his Russian roots for support at the polls on Nov. 8.

"It's clearly a very significant, growing population in New York City," said Bloomberg campaign spokesman Jordan Barowitz. "The Russian community is integral to the coalition that is supporting the mayor."

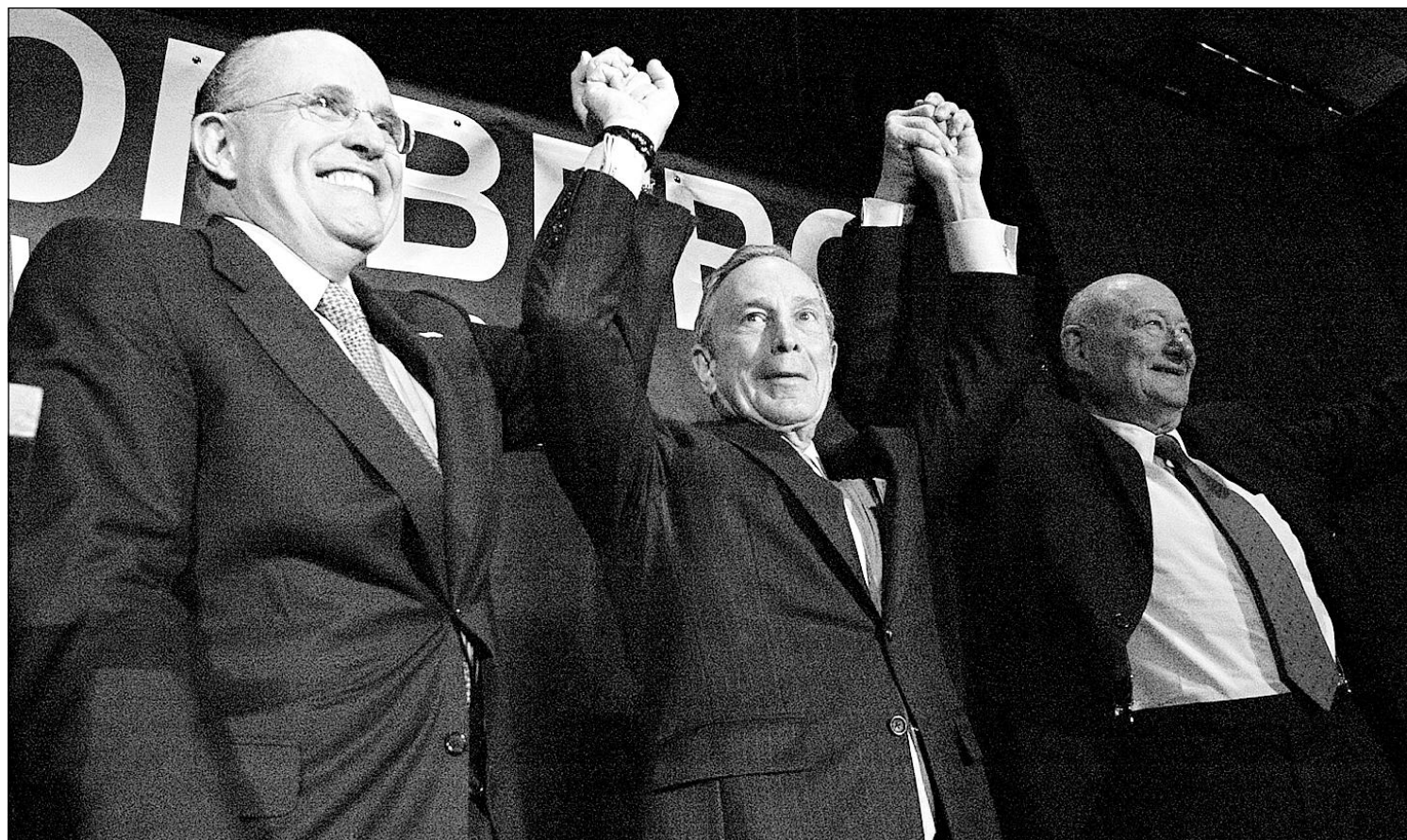
But even with the heritage on his side, courting the voting bloc of more than 250,000 who speak a different language and get most of their news from the Russian media is a tough task.

In September, Bloomberg's campaign turned to a Russian public relations company, the Firebird Group, for guidance about reaching out to the Russian voters through advertising and various campaign events in their community.

"The campaign came to us and they acknowledged the Russian-speaking community is important, and that they wanted to reach out in a unique way to them," said Rina Kirshner, president of the Firebird group.

"We became familiar with all the [advertising] materials they've created, and, though they are great, we realized that there have to be special materials for the Russian-speaking community, targeting what is important there — for example, small business ownership and housing."

Before long, Bloomberg's face graced the three Russian TV sta-



MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

Former New York City mayors Rudy Giuliani and Ed Koch (r.) endorse Mayor Bloomberg at the Grand Hyatt Friday.

tions at least twice a day, and his full-page campaign ads became a staple in the 15 Russian newspapers and magazines in New York.

"We asked the mayor to tape a phrase in Russian, but the first version was more than he could handle," said Kirshner. "He was supposed to say, 'Together we will better life in New York,' " Kirshner said with a smile. "He was really trying hard and it was great."

In the end, Bloomberg's Russian campaign slogan was not a far cry from the original version, — "Together we will better New York."

Kirshner says one of the challenges of reaching out to the Russian community is the fact that

many "Russians" are not in fact Russian and are spread out throughout the five boroughs.

"Many people lump it together as Russian-speaking, but in our community there are Bukharians, Ukrainians, Russians, Georgians and Armenians," Kirshner said. "It's always a challenge to unify them in one cause because of the different cultures."

For the first time, Russian media outlets broke their tradition of not endorsing candidates and backed Bloomberg for reelection.

And while the typical voter in the broader Russian community is attracted by Bloomberg's rags-to-riches story and his strong ties to Israel, it was his

constant presence in the community that sealed the deal for many.

"Bloomberg comes to us and reaches out to our community. It's safer now. Our people walk on the [Brighton Beach] Boardwalk without fear," said Fira Stukelman, 71, a Russian community leader and Holocaust survivor. Stukelman attended a campaign breakfast Friday with Bloomberg and former Mayors Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani at the 42nd St. Grand Hyatt.

"Bloomberg showed a lot of respect and attention to our community throughout his term," said Marina Kovalyova, co-founder and CEO of the Firebird Group.

"Under his leadership we got

the annual Russian Heritage Week three years ago, and now it's nearly a month-long celebration."

Ferrer's camp fired back, saying, "Unlike billionaire Republican Mike Bloomberg, who spares no expense making new promises to any New Yorker he can find, Freddy Ferrer has one simple message for all New Yorkers: to build a city that works better for all of us, with affordable housing, great schools and decent jobs in every neighborhood."

"Freddy does not need to hire a PR firm weeks before Election Day to speak to the Russian community that he's worked with as Bronx borough president."

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### Iran prez comment hit

MOSCOW — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Thursday that a comment by the Iranian president that Israel should be "wiped off the map" was unacceptable, and that Moscow would take the issue up with Tehran.

"What I saw on television was unacceptable. We will bring it to the attention of the Iranian side," Lavrov was quoted as saying by Interfax news agency during his trip to Jordan.

### Religious freedom plea

MOSCOW — Chechen President Alu Alkhanov urged Russia to foster religious tolerance in the war-torn region to help counter the spread of militant

Islam that's emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Russia needs to focus on such things as the education system as well as creating jobs in Chechnya, where unemployment runs at 58%, Alkhanov said Thursday. Chechnya is scheduled to hold elections Nov. 27 for its first parliament in eight years.

### Vatican-Russia ties

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican and Russia should establish full diplomatic relations because the current ties don't correspond to the weight each wields in the world, the Vatican's foreign minister said.

Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo also said he was convinced that the "difficult"

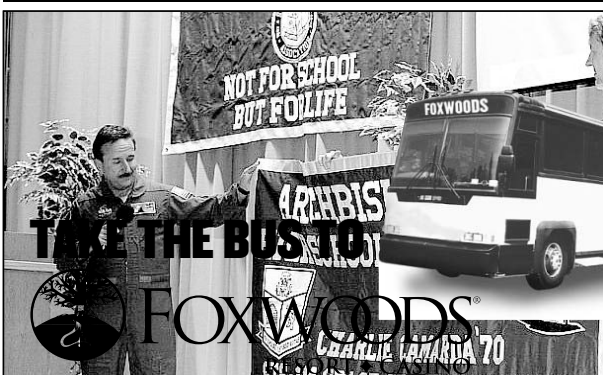
relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church were not "unresolvable" and said he prayed that the time becomes ripe for a visit to Russia by Pope Benedict.

Lajolo spoke on the eve of meetings with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Metropolitan Kirill, who heads the Russian Orthodox Church's foreign relations department.

### Ex-tycoon will fight on

MOSCOW — Mikhail Khodorkovsky promised supporters he would continue fighting Russia's "self-serving bureaucracy," two weeks after the former oil tycoon — once Russia's richest man — arrived in a Siberian prison camp to serve an eight-year sentence that many say was politically motivated.

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