



Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia

## NewsWatch February 2004

### Jerusalem Forum on Anti-Semitism

On January 28-29, representatives from dozens of Israeli, North American and European organizations convened in Jerusalem for a conference on anti-Semitism organized by Natan Sharansky, Israel's Minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs. The Global Forum Against Anti-Semitism brought together nearly 70 panelists to examine anti-Semitism in the Islamic world and Europe, and initiatives to combat it.

In a session on diplomacy's role in fighting anti-Semitism, NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin addressed the prospect of achieving a global parliamentary declaration opposing anti-

Semitism, a proposal introduced by Mr. Sharansky at the Forum.

Participants discussed preparations for the April OSCE conference in Berlin dedicated to anti-Semitism. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer urged, "It is important that OSCE members set up processes to monitor, track, and report hate crimes. Ultimately, the real test of progress after establishing this OSCE monitoring, tracking, and reporting mechanism will be the expansion of effective law enforcement measures to prevent and to punish such crimes."

Other sessions focused on mobilizing NGO fora, the experiences of European Jewish leaders in engaging their govern-



January: Minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky (left) and Islam specialist Bernard Lewis at the Global Forum Against Anti-Semitism, in Jerusalem

ments on the issue, and efforts to involve young Jewish leadership, academics and non-Jewish groups in the global fight against anti-Semitism.

### Russian Duma Elections Presage Putin Victory

Russia's December 3 parliamentary elections fulfilled expectations that President Vladimir Putin's supporters would consolidate their power ahead of the March 14, 2004, presidential election. The elections also tested new laws that further restrict the composition of political parties. The pro-Putin United Russia coalition locked in the largest share — about 40 percent — of seats. Surprisingly, nationalist parties came in a strong second, at nearly 20 percent, stripping seats from the Communists, and leaving liberal parties such as Yabloko (led by Grigory Yavlinsky) and the

Union of Rightist Forces (SPS, led by Boris Nemtsov) with no substantive representation in the new Duma.

Though public opinion polls show strong confidence in Putin and his coalition, members of the Russian Jewish community are concerned with the implications of such solid returns for nationalist parties — the Motherland-National Patriotic Union (led by Sergei Glazev and Dmitri Rogozin) and the Liberal Democratic Party (led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky) — have a history of using either indirect or overt anti-Semitism in their campaigns. December's elections had strong overtones of ethnic Russian solidarity and opposition to big business.

Some human rights and democracy activists have been cal-

ling for a boycott of the upcoming presidential election. Irina Khakamada, the only established liberal candidate running in March, has been criticized for lending legitimacy to the election. She has countered that the liberal parties lack a strong policy focus, and has assailed the Kremlin's handling of the 2002 theater hostage crisis, among other issues.

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December 2003: A Moscow campaign poster quotes President Vladimir Putin: "Together we must make Russia united and strong..." OSCE photo

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## Caucasus Elections a Mixed Bag in 2003



Tbilisi, November 23: Opposition supporters demonstrating against Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze; he resigned shortly after. Mikhail Saakashvili took office following his landslide victory in the January 2004 presidential election. OSCE Photo

### ARMENIA

Armenia's presidential and parliamentary elections in early 2003 ended in contentious victories for the ruling party and incumbent President Robert Kocharian, but international organizations noted progress over Armenia's past elections.

An inconclusive presidential contest in February between Kocharian and opposition candidate Stepan Demirchian was followed by large public protests and the arrest of hundreds of opposition activists. Kocharian won the runoff election in March.

The May parliamentary elections were rated by international observers as neither free nor fair. Opposition lawmakers boycotted the first session of the parliament, prompting Kocharian to lament that "no government can work efficiently if there is no opposition in the country."

Despite these events, international election observers, European institutions, and the United States noted greater media access for election contenders, and the participation of many recently enfranchised refugees.

### AZERBAIJAN

Similar protests followed Azerbaijan's November presidential election. While ailing longtime leader Heydar Aliyev had openly groomed his son for succession, the 2003 election presented the first opportunity in decades for a free and fair democratic election. The public erupted when, in reac-

tion to a presidential contest widely regarded as rigged, Ilham Aliyev claimed a victory over Musavat party leader Isa Gambar, with over 70 percent of the vote. Violent clashes between protesters and the police continued for days after the election, with over 600 arrests and one death among the protesters. In January, the United States and European Union urged the Azerbaijani government to release those detained, and jointly welcomed the release of 160 of those prisoners in mid-January. About 100 detainees were still being held without charge in early February.

Ilham Aliyev has promised to maintain the good relations his late father cultivated with the West and with Russia, though the post-election protests and detentions have strained ties. Relations between Azerbaijan's predominantly Muslim population and its Jews have historically been friendly.

### GEORGIA

The November parliamentary elections in Georgia precipitated a dramatic change in the country's leadership, strengthening Georgia's ties with the United States but causing friction with Russia. Vociferous public protest against November's fraudulent parliamentary elections brought about the ouster of incumbent President Eduard Shevardnadze in late November, and the elevation of Parliament Speaker Nino Burzhanadze to acting president. In consultation with the U.S. Government, Russia sent Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov to negotiate with Shevardnadze following the opposition takeover of the parliament building on November 22. Opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili was elected President in January, and new parliamentary elections are scheduled for March 28.

The Georgian Jewish community and other domestic observers were quick to cele-



Visit to NATO by the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, December 3, 2003: (l.-r.) President Kocharian with NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson NATO photo

brate Saakashvili's victory and the implications of an internationally recognized election brought about by the public will.

Saakashvili was praised for his leadership of the non-violent "Rose Revolution" and has raised hopes with his commitment to fighting corruption in the Georgian government.

Saakashvili continues to be challenged by the breakaway regions of Ajara, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia recently announced its intention to lift its visa regime with Ajara, as it has already done with the two other autonomous regions. The leader of Ajara, Aslan Abashidze, has been allied with Russia throughout the recent political upheavals and will likely continue to agitate against Georgia's new government.

At a Chanukah service on December 25, hosted by Israeli Ambassador Rivka Cohen, Saakashvili and other prominent leaders in Georgia's then-provisional government stated their support for Georgia's Jewish population, and to further strengthening Georgia's positive relations with Israel.

Maurice Krikheli, Director of the Tbilisi Hillel and a leader of the Georgian Jewish Community, wrote to NCSJ the morning after the election: "We in Georgia are all very proud that the newest choice of the Georgian people is for a proper, true, veritable democracy. . . . We in the Jewish community are very hopeful, and we believe that the near future will confirm our expectations. But we also realize it is time to start actively building a modern, appropriate Jewish lobby, which will protect the interests of Jews of Georgia not only in words, but in real acts."

For more information on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, please visit our country pages at [www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org).

## Russian Elections, cont'd

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The United States and European countries have expressed tempered concern at the monolithic results of the Duma elections. Visiting Moscow in January, Secretary of State Colin Powell issued a sharp criticism of recent events: "Russia's democratic system seems not yet to have found the essential balance among the executive, legislative and judicial functions. Political power is not yet tethered to law."

## Ambassadors and NCSJ Visit New York's Bukharian Community

On January 12, NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin joined U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan, Richard Hoagland; Tajik Ambassador to the United States, Khamrohon Zaripov; and leadership of the U.S. Congress of Bukharian Jews (USCJB) for a visit to the Bukharian Jewish community in Queens, New York. Boris Kandov, acting President of USCJB, and Aron Aronov, head of the Bukharian Jewish Community Museum, organized the visit, with the help of Susan Green and Michael Nemirovsky of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council, and NCSJ. After visiting Chief Bukharian Rabbi for the United States and Canada, Yitzchak Yoshua, the group toured the construction site for the new Bukharian Jewish

Community Center. They also visited USCJB's school and gymnasium, sponsored by Lev Leviev, President of the World Congress of Bukharian Jews. The delegation was particularly impressed by the Bukharian Jewish Community Museum, a center for research and education on New York's Jewish ethnic communities and a national spiritual center for the Bukharian community.

The group discussed the role of the Bukharian Jewish community in the increasingly significant U.S.-Tajik relationship. Ambassador Hoagland was named Ambassador to Tajikistan in October 2003.



New York City, January 8: (l.-r.) Susan Green, Jewish Community Relations Council of New York; Bukharian community leaders Rafi Nektalov, Nissim Nektalov, and Gregory Davidoff; Ambassador Khamrohon Zaripov, Ambassador of Tajikistan to the United States; Roman Nektalov, Vice President, World Congress of Bukharian Jews; Rabbi Yitzchak Yoshua, Chief Bukharian Rabbi for North America; Ambassador Richard Hoagland, U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan; Mark Levin, NCSJ Executive Director; Boris Kandov, President, World Congress of Bukharian Jews, North America photo: Michael Nemirovsky

### Goldschmidt 10th Anniversary



Moscow: Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt (center) celebrated his 10th anniversary as Chief Rabbi of Moscow in December 2003

### Ukraine Ratifies Sibir Air Settlement

NCSJ welcomed the Ukrainian parliament's December ratification of an agreement to compensate families of the Israeli victims of the 2001 Sibir Airlines crash. The settlement grants nearly \$7.5 million in payments to the relatives of the 40 Israeli dead. All 78 passengers on the plane, many recent Russian olim (immigrants), were killed by an errant Ukrainian missile launched as part of a military exercise. The plane was en route from Israel to Novosibirsk, Russia, when it was hit over the Black Sea. Ukraine continues to negotiate a settlement with Russia for relatives of the Russian citizens killed.

NCSJ aided the Israeli government's negotiations with Ukraine to help reach an equitable settlement.

### New OSCE Chairman Takes Initiative on Anti-Semitism

On January 16, NCSJ commended Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, the new Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for 2004, for using his first address before the OSCE Permanent Council to underscore his commitment and that of the OSCE to the forthcoming OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism, April 28-29 in Berlin. The OSCE region includes Europe, the former Soviet Union, and North America.

"Bulgaria has gone further than any previous Chairmanship in highlighting the issue of anti-Semitism so early in its term," NCSJ Chairman Dr. Robert J. Meth noted.

In his January 15 opening address,

which traditionally outlines the priorities of the incoming Chairman-in-Office, Dr. Passy stated: "We all need to pursue further OSCE objectives in combating aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of discrimination. The main focus will fall on preparing the three major forums: in Berlin on anti-Semitism, in Brussels on tolerance and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination and in Paris on the relationship between racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes."

In a letter to Dr. Passy on January 2, Dr. Meth, NCSJ President Dr. Joel M. Schindler and NCSJ Executive Director

Mark B. Levin had welcomed him to the Chairmanship. They stated, "The start of your Chairmanship would be an ideal opportunity to encourage participating states to cooperate fully with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. . . to restate the OSCE's commitment to fighting anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia; and to call on all participating states to send ministerial-level delegations to the April 28-29 Berlin conference, including representation from education and interior ministries, law enforcement, and parliamentary leadership."

For more information, please visit <http://Berlin2004.org>

## Ukrainian Patriarch, NCSJ, Discuss Strategies to Combat Anti-Semitism



At NCSJ, December 10: (l.-r.) Shai Franklin, NCSJ Director of Governmental Relations; Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs; His Beatitude Lubomyr; Metropolitan Stephan Soroka of the Philadelphia Archdiocese of the Ukrainian Catholic Church; Michael Sawkiw, President, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America; Mark Levin, NCSJ Executive Director

**H**is Beatitude Lubomyr Huzar, Patriarch of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, visited NCSJ's offices December 12 to discuss anti-Semitism and issues of concern to Ukraine's five million Greek Catholics, the largest non-Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Metropolitan Stephan Soroka of the Philadelphia Archdiocese of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and Michael Sawkiw, President of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, accompanied the Patriarch.

Stating his commitment to promoting tolerance in Ukraine, His Beatitude Lubomyr asked NCSJ and the American Jewish community for advice and assistance in fighting anti-Semitism, promoting better awareness of Jewish concerns, and using education to promote tolerance among Ukrainian Greek Catholics and others. "We have to live as real neighbors," he stressed, recalling the Soviet strategy of alienating groups from each other through miseducation and stereotyping.

"NCSJ looks forward to working with the Patriarch and others to educate for tolerance and advance common goals," said Levin.

Regarding the restitution of religious and communal property, NCSJ and the Patriarch agreed on the need for Ukrainian laws that authorize the return of properties seized during the Soviet period without restricting the freedom of minority faiths. During the Soviet era, the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine was driven underground or liquidated, and many of its followers were killed, imprisoned, or exiled. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community are both seeking to recover former places of worship and community buildings.

The Patriarch reported on a new independent entity being formed with Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim leaders in order to coordinate efforts on restitution and better represent minority faiths to the government and to Ukrainian society.



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2020 K Street, NW, Suite 7800 Tel.: 202-898-2500  
Washington, D.C. 20006 Fax: 202-898-0822

[www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org)

Email: [ncsj@ncsj.org](mailto:ncsj@ncsj.org)

**Chairman**  
**President**  
**Executive Director**  
**NewsWatch Editor**

*Robert J. Meth, M.D.*  
*Joel M. Schindler, Ph.D.*  
*Mark B. Levin*  
*Sarah E. Hutchison*