



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF

Washington, D.C. Friday, March 3, 2006

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#1a

Uzbek Jewish leader dies JTA Brief, February 27, 2006

Jewish officials in the former Soviet Union appealed to Uzbek authorities to investigate the death of the Central Asian country's Jewish leader. Rabbi Avraham Yagudayev, 33, died Saturday of injuries he received two days earlier in what the authorities have described as a road accident. Yagudayev was found unconscious and severely injured on a road near his synagogue, but the circumstances of the tragedy remain unknown, local Jewish leaders say.

Yagudayev was a leader of the Bukharian Jewish community of Uzbekistan and chairman of the synagogue in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

The Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union called on the authorities to determine whether Yagudayev was a victim of an anti-Semitic attack.

#1b

Alleged synagogue attacker pleads not guilty JTA Brief, February 28, 2006

A Russian man suspected of attacking worshippers in a Moscow synagogue pleaded not guilty to a charge of attempted murder. Alexander Koptsev, 20, told a Russian judge on Tuesday that he was not guilty because the Criminal Code was "written by Jews and the Jewish Mafia."

Prosecutors classified the Jan. 11 attack in which eight people were injured as attempted murder and attempt to cause injuries because of ethnic or religious hatred, which in Russia carry a maximum punishment of life in prison.

The hearings are expected to take at least a few more weeks.

#1c

Ukrainian school raises ritual murder charge

JTA Brief, March 1, 2006

A Ukrainian university known for its anti-Semitic activities commemorated a Christian boy whose death triggered a ritual murder trial.

Last week, leaders of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, or MAUP, visited the grave of Andrei Yuschinsky and commemorated him, "who was murdered by Jews with ritual purpose," the school's magazine wrote.

The 1911 murder of the 13-year-old boy in Kiev resulted in the trial of Mendel Beilis, a Jewish man who was accused of ritual murder. After two years in prison, the jury acquitted Beilis of all charges. "The boy Yuschinsky was sacrificed to dedicate the Chasidic Lubavitch central synagogue," read an article in the Personnel Plus magazine last week.

Georgy Schokin, leader of MAUP and head of the Conservative Party that will run in next month's parliamentary election in Ukraine, said he would spearhead the canonization process for Yuschinsky by the Orthodox Church. Church officials have not reacted to the idea.

Last year, MAUP was responsible for more than 80 percent of all anti-Semitic articles that appeared in the Ukrainian newspapers, a recent audit by the Va'ad of Ukraine, a Jewish group, revealed.

#1d

Russia to Hamas: Recognize Israel

JTA Brief, March 3, 2006

Russia's foreign minister told Hamas on Friday that it wouldn't have a future if it doesn't become a political party and recognize Israel. Sergey Lavrov said he told a Hamas delegation visiting Moscow that it must abide by existing agreements. That means "the need to recognize the right of Israel to exist as a partner in negotiations (and) the need to reject all armed methods of settling political questions," Interfax, the Russian news agency, quoted Lavrov as saying. He said the group needs to transform itself into a political party, and its military wing should be incorporated into the Palestinian Authority security infrastructure.

Leading the delegation was Khaled Mashaal, Hamas' Damascus-based political leader. Mashaal said Hamas would not recognize Israel, but described the meeting with Lavrov as a "good, constructive" talk.

Israeli diplomats told news agencies that they expected Russia to condemn Mashaal for his intransigence.

#1e

Russian Jewish leaders split on Hamas visit

JTA Brief, March 3, 2006

Russian Jewish leaders expressed opposing views on Friday's visit of a Hamas delegation to Moscow. President Vladimir Putin "should have taken the opinion of Russian Jews into consideration," Mikhail Chlenov, secretary general of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, wrote in a statement Thursday. "I find it difficult to judge what President Putin is striving for, but we, Russian Jews, do not want to host child murderers."

However, Adolf Shayevich, one of Russia's chief rabbis, said last week that he had no problem with Hamas' visit to Moscow, and praised Putin for the invitation.

#1f

Swastika painted on Russian Jewish center JTA Brief, March 3, 2006

A swastika was spray-painted on the doors of a Jewish charitable center in Russia. Local Jews notified police of Monday's episode at the Hasdei Yerushalayim Jewish charitable center in the central Russia city of Saratov.

Jewish activists said it was only the latest act of anti-Semitic vandalism in Saratov in recent months. In previous incidents, vandals shattered several windows in the facility and skinhead youths shouted anti-Semitic threats at Jewish employees and visitors to the charitable center.

Ten days before the most recent incident, vandals spray-painted "Death to Yids" on the walls of the center and the local office of the Jewish Agency for Israel. No arrests have been reported in any of the incidents, local activists said.

#1g

Russian Jewish leaders split on Hamas visit JTA Brief, March 3, 2006

Russian Jewish leaders expressed opposing views on Friday's visit of a Hamas delegation to Moscow. President Vladimir Putin "should have taken the opinion of Russian Jews into consideration," Mikhail Chlenov, secretary general of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, wrote in a statement Thursday. "I find it difficult to judge what President Putin is striving for, but we, Russian Jews, do not want to host child murderers."

However, Adolf Shayevich, one of Russia's chief rabbis, said last week that he had no problem with Hamas' visit to Moscow, and praised Putin for the invitation.

#2

NCSJ Calls for Halt in Russian Meetings with Hamas Urges Putin to reconsider Negotiations February 24, 2006

His Excellency Vladimir V. Putin
President of the Russian Federation
The Kremlin
Moscow, Russian Federation

Dear President Putin:

We are deeply distressed about your government's invitation to meet with leaders of the Hamas Islamic resistance movement in Moscow. Hamas is a terrorist organization whose covenant calls for the destruction of Israel and its replacement by an Islamic state. Immediately following its victory in the Palestinian elections, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar stated: "Recognizing the state of the Israeli enemy is not on the table. Our program is to liberate Palestine, all of Palestine." Hamas has masterminded more than 60 suicide bombings against Israel since 2000, killing and injuring hundreds of civilians, including numerous Russian emigrants.

We are aware of your government's intention to seek recognition of Israel's right to exist from Hamas. However, meeting with this self-avowed terrorist group before it has shown itself to be prepared to negotiate with Israel confers an undeserved legitimacy upon them.

Hamas is not only anti-Israel and anti-Zionist, but also openly anti-Semitic. Extending an invitation to the Kremlin to a group that urges jihad against all Jews in its Charter undermines your statements condemning anti-Semitism and supporting Jewish communities throughout Russia.

Furthermore, Hamas has exhibited hostility towards Russia by recognizing Chechen terrorists as part of the global jihad and supporting their terrorist activities. In a meeting with NCSJ in 2005, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that he would not speak with Anzor Maskhadov because he had blood on his hands. Holding talks with Hamas while condemning talks with Chechens is creating a double standard.

Moscow has called for a united international front against terrorism, arguing that one nation's terrorist should not be another nation's freedom fighter. In light of the above, we believe that your reception of Hamas could damage both Russia's international reputation and the Quartet Roadmap. It seems very doubtful that the arrival of Hamas leaders in Moscow will lead to any breakthrough.

We agree with your initial assessment that the Hamas victory is a "very serious blow" to the peace process. We respectfully urge you, Mr. President, to reconsider your position on negotiating with these self-declared terrorists. We strongly recommend that Russia insist that Hamas comply with the three conditions agreed upon by the Quartet in January 2006: Hamas must commit to nonviolence, recognize Israel's existence and security, and pledge to uphold previous agreements and obligations, before any conversation is to take place.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Meth, M.D.
Chairman

Joel M. Schindler, Ph.D.
President

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director

#3

Armenian Furor Over PBS Plan for Debate

By Randal C. Archibold

NY Times, February 25, 2006

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 24 — The Public Broadcasting Service's plan to show a debate after its documentary in April on the Ottoman Turks' massacres of Armenians has infuriated Armenian-Americans. The debate, which includes two people who deny that the massacre constituted genocide, has ignited an aggressive campaign against the network.

A major Armenian lobbying group, the Armenian National Committee of America, has also asked PBS to cancel the program, which was produced by Oregon Public Broadcasting to accompany a new one-hour documentary, "The Armenian Genocide," scheduled to be shown on April 17. Organizers of an Internet petition against the half-hour discussion program said more than 11,000 people had signed it on the Web site.

In the latest twist to the controversy, the PBS station in Los Angeles, KCET-TV, said Thursday that it would broadcast neither the discussion program nor the documentary, making it difficult for most of the nearly

400,000 Armenians in the Los Angeles area to see either one. The station said it would show two other films dealing with the killings, mollifying some Armenians here.

PBS said that its 348 affiliates would decide independently whether to carry the film or the panel discussion and that it would not keep track of the decisions. Stations in Washington and in Plattsburgh, N.Y., which reaches the large Armenian community in Montreal, said they would run the film but not the panel discussion, while stations in Chicago and New York said they would run both.

Few topics among Armenians generate as much passion as the deaths of some 1.5 million Armenians by execution, starvation or disease during a World War I era campaign by Turks in the Ottoman Empire to wipe them out. Armenians have lobbied for decades for worldwide recognition of the atrocities as genocide.

Most historical accounts accept this view, but the Turkish government has denied for years that the deaths were a result of a state-directed effort to exterminate the Armenian people and argued that the Armenian death toll has been inflated — and some historians agree.

A call to the Turkish Embassy spokesman in Washington was not answered.

In the past, the Turkish government, an important ally of the United States in the region, has hired Washington lobbyists to help defeat attempts by Congress to pass resolutions condemning the killings as genocide. Representatives of the Turkish government have suggested, among other things, that labeling them as genocide would jeopardize support for American military bases there.

President Ronald Reagan publicly called the killings genocide, but his successors, including President Bush, in presidential proclamations condemning the massacres, have avoided the term.

Unlike the dozens of other documentaries on the subject, the documentary for PBS, by Andrew Goldberg, includes rare clips of Turkish scholars acknowledging the anti-Armenian campaign as genocide as well as Turkish villagers recalling their ancestors' stories about participating in the killings.

"They caught Armenians and put them in a barn and burned them," a man in a town in eastern Turkey tells an interviewer.

Excitement swept through Armenian-American communities at word that PBS would broadcast the film, but anger quickly followed when it was announced that a taped panel discussion including people who dispute that genocide occurred would follow.

A call to Jacoba Atlas, a top programming executive at PBS headquarters in Alexandria, Va., was answered by Lea Sloan, a spokeswoman for PBS, who said the network "acknowledges and accepts that there was a genocide."

But it ordered the panel discussion, she said, to explore more deeply the question of why the Turkish government and its supporters continue to reject the genocide label.

"PBS believes that an essential part of its mission is to offer a forum for intelligent, rational conversation and informed debate and to bring that debate and help illuminate the issue through discussion," she said. She denied that the network acted under pressure from Turkey, which in the past has complained publicly about genocide-related programming on the network.

Mr. Goldberg said he played no role in the production of the panel discussion — which features testy exchanges using the words "myth," "fantasy" and "legend" — and said he found it unnecessary.

Moderated by the National Public Radio correspondent Scott Simon, it includes two people who deny genocide took place — Justin A. McCarthy, a history professor at the University of Louisville, and Omer Turan, a history professor at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey — as well as two people

advocating the recognition of genocide, Peter Balakian, a Colgate University humanities professor, and Taner Akcam, a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota.

Mr. Balakian said he participated only because producers told him that PBS would not show the documentary without it.

David Davis, vice president for national production at Oregon Public Broadcasting, declined to address Mr. Balakian's claim directly but said, "PBS did make it clear they felt the follow show was important, and we felt it was important as well."

Mr. Balakian, who wrote a bestselling account called "The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response" (HarperCollins, 2003), said he was still angry.

"I think the convening of the panel is morally wrong," Mr. Balakian said. "It should not have been done. I wrote an extensive letter to PBS, explaining why this is ethically wrong and why this is unnecessary and why it caves in to Turkish government denial."

Mr. McCarthy, however, said PBS was right to provide a forum for opposing viewpoints. He said the strife between minority Christian Armenians and majority Muslim Turks is complicated and misunderstood.

"I think the Muslims and Armenians killed each other," he said. "I don't think there was a central government-directed genocide."

Mr. Goldberg said he was surprised that KCET in Los Angeles would not show his film because it had shown his work before and had acted as host for a reception in 2004 where he sought the support of Armenian-Americans for his project.

The station said that on April 17 it will broadcast "Le Génocide Arménien," the American television premiere of a French documentary produced last year by Laurence Jourdan. During the month it will also show "My Son Shall Be Armenian," a 2004 Canadian-produced film it has shown before.

Mary Mazur, the station's chief programming executive, said the station decided on the French film not because of the controversy surrounding the panel but because it was stronger than Mr. Goldberg's film.

"It is illustrative of events which took place prior to World War I and might be less familiar to our broad viewing audience," she said.

Harut Sassounian, the editor and publisher of The California Courier, the Los Angeles newspaper serving the Armenian community that first spread word of the petitions and protests against the panel, said he was pleased that KCET decided not to broadcast the discussion and he approved of the films it had selected.

"This resolves for KCET and the community the panel discussion issue," said Mr. Sassounian, who said the chosen films were "excellent."

But he and other Armenian-Americans are still pressing PBS, and now its affiliates, to drop the panel discussion. It has also enlisted the rock band System of a Down, made up of Armenian-Americans from Los Angeles, which has posted links to the online petition on its Web site.

"PBS is a publicly funded entity," said Steve Dadaian, the Western region chairman of the Armenian National Committee. "They exist because tax dollars fund them. If they are going to use the network to give a national stage to this kind of hate, to denialists of the genocide, then we don't want our tax dollars going there."

#4

Feud over Russian tycoon's role disrupts European Jewish meeting

By Dinah A. Spritzer

JTA, February 26, 2006

PRAGUE, Feb. 26 (JTA) — A fight over the role of a Russian tycoon at the recent European Jewish Congress general assembly is threatening to overshadow the organization's political agenda. The EJC's president, Pierre Besnainou, accused the Russian Jewish Congress' president, Moshe Kantor, of engaging in "blackmail" at the Feb. 19 meeting after the latter said he would give the organization a donation of \$475,000 only if he could have oversight of money that he brought in from donors in his role as chairman of the board of governors.

European Jewish leaders share their troubles E.U., Europe's Jews at odds The vice president of the EJC, Ariel Muzicant, concurred with Besnainou, suggesting that Kantor was trying to thwart democracy. "There can only be one president, and what Mr. Kantor wants is to take over without being elected."

The squabble came as the EJC is trying to have a greater influence on key European political leaders in issues of Middle East policy and anti-Semitism, which have leapt to the top of the European political agenda in recent months.

Some European Jewish leaders privately worry that Kantor, owner of one of Russia's largest fertilizer firms, is seeking to take over the EJC with his large donations. He already claims he is the EJC's largest personal donor, providing the organization with more than \$175,000 annually.

Kantor, 52, made his fortune in the metal business in the first years after the fall of communism, relying largely on connections he made with top government officials under former President Boris Yeltsin. Israeli police recently questioned Kantor in Jerusalem together with several other so-called Russian oligarchs, although an official investigation was not launched.

Kantor and his supporters, mostly delegates from the former Eastern Bloc, counter that Besnainou, who is French, is a Western European on a power trip who is unwilling to recognize what donors want.

"Am I supposed to find donors with mental illnesses? Those are the only ones who would give their money to an organization without knowing from the beginning where their money is going to go," Kantor said in a phone interview following the general assembly.

As for trading his money for influence, Kantor responded, "Who is the largest donor to the World Jewish Congress? Edgar Bronfman. And he is the president too, right? What do you think would happen if the others at the World Jewish Congress told him to take his money and go to hell?"

Kantor left the meeting early after a new set of bylaws that would have given him oversight of donor money failed to pass among the delegates from the 40 European Jewish community federations the EJC represents.

Despite its internal strife, the organization in the last year displayed newfound success at forging ties with key E.U. commissioners and prime ministers in their lobbying efforts for Jewish and Israeli causes. The 20-year-old EJC, a World Jewish Congress affiliate, was at least partly responsible for helping to stop a major neo-Nazi march in Greece in 2005.

EJC projects for the coming year include establishing a European research and action center on anti-Semitism in Brussels, a colloquium of European intellectuals in Budapest in the spring and an interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews.

The organization, with a proposed budget of roughly \$1.3 million, is still \$475,000 short of the money it needs to fund this year's projects, the exact amount Kantor had been willing to donate, according to Besnainou.

The conflict over Kantor comes just at a time when Besnainou was trying to redefine the EJC and make it more independent of the World Jewish Congress. He has repeatedly stressed that European Jews, not Americans, should be talking to European politicians about Israel.

Instead of elaborating on future projects, however, delegates spent a large portion of the general assembly hashing out the battle of the bylaws, a conflict over Kantor's role that began last year after the general assembly elected Besnainou president.

From the start of his term, he made it clear that he disapproved of the move by his predecessor, Italy's Kobi Benatoff, who rewarded Kantor's generosity to the EJC by making him chairman of the board of governors, a move narrowly approved by delegates.

Kantor earned kudos spending millions of his own dollars organizing a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary liberation of Auschwitz, an event attended by 42 heads of state.

"The problem was there were no rules defining Mr. Kantor's post and every functioning organization needs rules," Besnainou said.

Proposed bylaws backed by Besnainou, which made Kantor a fund-raiser who would answer to the president, failed to pass in Vienna. However, a last-minute resolution was passed that gave the EJC executive, not Kantor, the right to appoint the yet-to-exist board of governors.

It is uncertain how the debate over Kantor's influence will affect the EJC in the long term.

Stephen Herbits, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, expressed his annoyance that the dispute, which had also been the main theme of last year's general assembly, was continuing.

"There is this endless discussion of bylaws that takes away from real issues. This has been going on in this organization for years. Meanwhile Europe is facing an entirely new set of challenges — for the first time Europe is playing a decisive role in the Middle East — and this is what the EJC should be focusing on," he said.

"The EJC needs a whole new approach, a whole new structure, to deal with the challenges of Jews in Europe today," he added.

Serge Cwajgenbaum, secretary general of the EJC, denied that dispute over bylaws would harm the EJC's efficacy. "The European Constitution didn't pass but the E.U. is still there, isn't it?"

He acknowledged that the EJC still depends on the WJC for the vast majority of its funding. The whole point of creating a board of governors, really donors, is to help the organization become more financially independent and to raise money at a time when a resurgence of anti-Semitism, the threat of Hamas and Iran requires new resources.

In the end, Kantor may still be a key source of funding for the organization.

Last year, he founded the European Jewish Fund with, millions of dollars from his own resources.

"The fund is ready to support European Jewish Congress as well as any Jewish community in Europe if the projects are good."

Another issue posed by the internal strife in the EJC is the greater desire of Russia and former Eastern bloc countries to have a greater say in European Jewish organizations that were previously dominated by the British, French and Italians.

Kantor noted that Russia has third largest number of Jews in Europe after France and Britain.

Stephen Kramer, general secretary of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, is no stranger to dealing with Russian Jews in his native country. He said he understood why some felt Kantor was being too easily pushed aside.

“All the Russians want is a little respect,” he said.

#5

An Explosive Gas Deal Putin's Hard Bargain Could Undermine Democracy in Europe

By Jackson Diehl

Washington Post, February 27, 2006

Sometimes the stumbling blocks in international affairs are glaringly obvious -- such as the victory of Islamic fundamentalists in Palestinian elections, which has at least temporarily paralyzed the Bush administration's policy of promoting democracy in the Middle East. Sometimes, though, they are complicated, confusing or simply opaque, and thus barely reported on by the press or understood beyond a small circle of experts.

That might explain why there has been so little discussion in Washington of a gas deal between Russia and Ukraine this winter that, in its own way, may be as significant as the Palestinian vote. Here is a terribly dense tangle of a half-dozen contracts that involves hidden partners, disputed pricing arrangements, and esoteric side agreements about transit fees and storage facilities. It is mind-numbingly boring -- and it may tip the balance against democracy in much of the eastern half of Europe.

The story surfaced briefly at the beginning of January, when Russian President Vladimir Putin made the mistake of partially halting gas deliveries to Ukraine -- and to much of Western Europe, which receives Russian supplies through a Ukrainian pipeline. Chastised by big customers such as Germany, Putin -- who had been trying to force Ukraine to accept a 400 percent price increase -- quickly turned the gas back on. A couple of days later a deal was announced in Moscow and Kiev that appeared to resolve the dispute more or less equitably: The nominal price of Ukraine's gas rose by a mere 90 percent.

It was not until more than a month later that the Bush administration and other key allies of Ukraine's pro-Western government -- elected after the popular Orange Revolution of 2004 -- learned more about what was in the Russian-Ukrainian contracts. When they did they were stunned. Ukraine's president, Viktor Yushchenko, and Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov had agreed to purchase Ukraine's gas through a Swiss trading company whose owners and beneficiaries are publicly unknown -- but are rumored to include senior officials and organized crime figures in both Russia and Ukraine. They granted this same shadowy company a 50 percent share in the business of delivering gas to Ukrainian consumers. They accepted a price deal on gas delivered to Ukraine lasting only a few months but guaranteed that rock-bottom rates charged by Ukraine for the storage and transit of Russian gas to the West would be frozen for 25 years.

What does this have to do with democracy in Europe? In effect, some U.S. experts concluded, the Ukrainians may have sold to Putin that which he was prevented from stealing: a Kremlin stranglehold on Ukraine's government. The Russian leader poured money and men into his huge neighbor in late 2004 in a blatant bid to install a pro-Moscow strongman as president and make Ukraine's political system a mirror of the new authoritarian Russian order. His overreach triggered the Orange Revolution and the subsequent democratic election of Yushchenko, whose goals include leading Ukraine to membership in NATO and the European Union.

Putin sees the fragile new democracy in Ukraine, and an allied government in the tiny Black Sea nation of Georgia, as dire threats. If Western-style freedom consolidates and spreads in the former Soviet republics of Eastern Europe, his own undemocratic regime will be isolated and undermined. What's more, Ukraine and its neighbors are likely to integrate with Europe rather than remaining economic and political vassals of Russia.

After a turbulent year of free politics, Ukraine has another crucial election, for a newly empowered parliament, scheduled for March 26. This time Putin has avoided open intervention in the campaign. Instead he triggered the gas crisis and presented his Ukrainian enemies with a choice: Swallow a mammoth midwinter price increase for the fuel Ukrainians use to heat their homes, just weeks before the election, or hand Russia a commanding long-term stake in Ukrainian energy infrastructure -- and the ability to trigger a gas supply crisis at any time. Yushchenko and Yekhanurov chose the second option, while also agreeing to divert some of the huge profits to undisclosed beneficiaries. When confronted by U.S. officials, they claimed that they had no choice; until now they have denied knowing who owns the shell company through which Ukraine will channel billions of dollars.

How to save democracy in Ukraine, and the chance it will someday spread back to Russia? As in the Middle East, the Bush administration faces some difficult choices. If pro-Western parties lead the next government -- something that is far from certain -- President Bush could press them to scrap the gas deal as a condition for taking the first step toward membership in NATO, a "membership action plan." But that would probably lead to a new face-off between Ukraine and Putin, in which Kiev would require U.S. and European support -- at a moment when those same allies are pleading for the Kremlin's help with the Palestinians and Iran.

Or the administration could decide to sidestep Putin's gas-fired imperialism, leaving a complicated issue to its present obscurity. The Ukrainians might eventually find a way to free themselves from Russia's chokehold. But they also might allow one of the signal democratic breakthroughs of the Bush years to suffer a crippling reverse.

#6

'Energy Egotism Is a Road to Nowhere'

By Vladimir V. Putin

Wall Street Journal, February 28, 2006

MOSCOW -- The establishment of a reliable and comprehensive system of energy security is one of the strategic goals for the G-8 -- of which Russia assumed the presidency in January -- and the world community as a whole. Today, energy is an engine of social and economic progress. This is why it directly affects the well-being of billions of people around the globe. During the Russian presidency of the G-8, not only will we seek to develop fundamental approaches to meeting current challenges in this field, but also outline our coordinated policy for the long term.

Today, the lack of stability in the hydrocarbon markets poses a real threat to global energy supply. In particular, the gap between supply and demand continues to widen. The apparent increase in energy consumption in Asian countries is caused not only by market fluctuations but also by a host of other factors related to policy and security. In order to stabilize the situation in this field, coordinated activities of the entire world community are needed.

The new policy of the leading countries should be based on the understanding that the globalization of the energy sector makes energy security indivisible. Our common future in the area of energy means common responsibilities, risks and benefits.

In our view, it is especially important to develop a strategy for achieving global energy security. It should be based on a long-term, reliable and environmentally sustainable energy supply at prices affordable to both the exporting countries and the consumers. In addition to reconciling the interests of stakeholders in global

energy interaction, we will have to identify practical measures aimed at ensuring sustainable access for the world economy to traditional sources of energy, as well as promoting energy-saving programs and developing alternative energy sources.

A balanced and fair energy supply is undoubtedly a pillar of global security at present and in the years to come. We ought to pass on to the future generations a world energy architecture that would help avoid conflicts and counterproductive competition for energy security. This is why it is essential to find common approaches to creating a solid and long-term energy base for our civilization.

In this connection, Russia calls on the G-8 countries and the international community to focus their efforts on developing innovative technologies. This could serve as an initial step in creating a technological basis for mankind's energy supply in the future, when the energy potential in its present form is exhausted.

Global energy security will also benefit from an integrated approach to enhancing the energy efficiency of social and economic development. The G-8 made important progress toward elaborating this last year at Gleneagles, including, in particular, the adoption of a Plan of Action aimed at promoting innovation, energy saving and environmental protection. We find it crucially important to engage non-G-8 countries -- especially fast-growing and industrializing economies -- in G-8 initiatives and, particularly, in implementing the document adopted at Gleneagles.

The way most people see it, energy security has mainly to do with the interests of industrially developed countries. It should be kept in mind, however, that almost two billion people in today's world do not enjoy modern-day energy services, while many lack access even to electricity. Their access to many benefits and advances of civilization has been virtually blocked.

Needless to say, energy alone would not solve the poverty problem. At the same time, lack of energy resources throughout different regions significantly hinders economic growth, while their unsustainable use may result in an ecological disaster on a global rather than local scale.

Lately, experts have been actively discussing ways of increasing energy use in developing countries through a more intensive development of unconventional energy sources. And this is where assistance rendered by the G-8 in developing and introducing alternative power facilities becomes so important.

Generally speaking, all of us should recognize and admit that "energy egotism" in a modern and highly interdependent world is a road to nowhere. Therefore, Russia's attitude toward energy security remains clear and unchanged. It is our strong belief that energy redistribution guided wholly by the priorities of a small group of the most-developed countries does not serve the goals and purposes of global development. We will strive to create an energy security system sensitive to the interests of the whole international community. Basically, all it takes is for mankind to create a balanced potential in order to provide every state with sustainable energy supply, and international cooperation opens all avenues for that. Russia is ready to contribute actively to further progress in this direction.

#7

Russians Expect US To Use NGOs to Pressure for Greater Democracy

"They Are Going to Give the G8 Chairman a Lesson in Democracy"

By Yuliya Petrovskaya and Andrey Tekekhov

Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 27, 2006

The United States is thinking about how to put pressure on the Kremlin through nongovernmental organizations.

The US administration intends to express serious concern at the state of Russian democracy. At the present time American officials are discussing ways of expressing this concern. As the influential newspaper notes, with a reference to informed sources, one of the options under consideration is a "direct

and sharply-worded statement by a high government official, possibly Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, clearly laying out the US views on the direction in which Russia is moving."

Along with this they are studying the possibility of holding a "meeting of groups of human rights advocates, democracy supporters, and other representatives of civil society within Russia or outside its borders to demonstrate American support for those who are experiencing Kremlin pressure." As is noted, a toughening of the American line in relation to Moscow may take place on the eve of the Big Eight summit in Saint Petersburg, which will be held in July.

The RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID), has been told, "unquestionably paid attention to the article in the." At Smolensk-Haymarket Square they are "studying the idea that has been heard, of inviting representatives of non-governmental, non-commercial organizations." At the same time, the diplomats noted that this is a newspaper article, not an official statement. In diplomatic circles they say that Moscow is not dramatizing the reports of a possible invitation of representatives of Russian NGOs to a meeting with US representatives.

"Public opinion in Russia is more complex than it seems to some people abroad, that is, it is not only negative," our informant clarified. He also noted that the RF MID would not erect obstacles to representatives of Russian NGOs traveling to such a meeting: "That is not within the jurisdiction of the MID."

There has been no report that prominent human rights advocates have received invitations to a meeting. Some of them, however, believe that this event would be very useful.

Lyudmila Alekseyeva, chairwoman of the Moscow Helsinki Group, in an interview with Gazeta, does not rule out the possibility that the non-governmental organizations may come together and express their position. "Such a move would perhaps allow the special services to claim that the Russian NGOs are acting on orders from abroad. But it is obvious that no one American official is capable of making the NGO representatives, both Russian and foreign, come together." Alekseyeva recalled that the RF authorities have "officially blessed" public participation in the Big Eight. Thus, on 16 February representatives of Russian non-governmental organizations met in Moscow to work out recommendations for the Big Eight meeting in Saint Petersburg. And on 9-10 March a meeting of NGO representatives is planned in Moscow to finalize their appeal to the G8.

"People in the West were very unpleasantly surprised by the offensive against non-governmental organizations in Russia. I think that a new attack on NGOs will begin after the summit, sometime in August. And the non-governmental organizations will do something. I do not rule out the possibility that we will in fact come together and express our concern with the situation," Alekseyeva summarized.

For his part, Arseniy Roginskiy, chairman of Memorial, told : "If an invitation is received we will study it. And if the meeting makes sense in terms of objectives and composition I do not see anything wrong with taking part in it."

Washington is carefully following the development of the situation in Russia after adoption of the law on NGOs. And observers think that the situation with non-governmental organizations could be one of the important subjects at the Big Eight summit.

Nikolay Zlobin, director of Russian and Asian programs at the Center for Defense Information in Washington, told : "In the American mentality, the civil society -- and non-governmental organizations are an important part of it -- has more rights than the state. The RF authorities, for their part, begin from the idea that NGOs should assist the state, and therefore they would take the American invitation as intervention in the country's internal affairs. The Americans should be aware of how such an invitation will be seen in Russia."

Zlobin thinks that the law on non-governmental organizations, in terms of the impact it has had on Russia's image, may be compared with the YukOS case and the arrest of Khodorkovskiy. "This law is going into

force shortly before the first summit of the Big Eight under Russian chairmanship, when colossal attention will certainly be focused on the county. Many forces in the United States will try to force Bush to come out with criticism of Russia at the summit, including for the NGO law," the expert emphasized.

#8

Anti-Semitism suspected in murder of Uzbekistan Rabbi

By Amiram Barkat

Haaretz, February 28, 2006

A rabbi in Tashkent, Uzbekistan was mysteriously murdered last Tuesday evening some time after leaving his synagogue. Rabbi Avraham Yegudiyev was found unconscious with a head injury by family members who searched for him after he failed to return home.

He died in the hospital on Saturday night. His funeral was held Sunday in Tashkent.

Yegudiyev, 34, who is survived by his wife and four young children, was originally from Bukhara. The family was poor and had been supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). His brother Nikolai disappeared 12 years ago under mysterious circumstances.

Three-and-a-half years ago, after the death of Yegudiyev's father, who was the synagogue beadle, Yegudiyev became the head of the congregation, considered the oldest of the three active in Tashkent.

The synagogue was located in a primarily Jewish-population neighborhood, however, in recent years, the number of worshippers had dwindled. Yegudiyev also served as a ritual slaughterer and Bar Mitzvah tutor.

"He was a pleasant man who contributed a great deal to the community," Israel's ambassador to Uzbekistan, Ami Mahal, told Haaretz on Monday. "His death is a great tragedy."

Relatives of Yegudiyev living in Israel told Haaretz they were certain the murder had been motivated by anti-Semitism. His cousin, Ziva Mor, said that she and other relatives had begged the family to come to Israel but they had refused.

Uzbekistan is considered a moderate Muslim country, however fundamentalist Muslims are known to be active. Until 15 years ago, some 200,000 Jews lived there, a number that has now declined to only a few thousand.

The neighborhood where Yegudiyev's synagogue is located is said to be crime-ridden and a focus of extreme Islamic activism.

Mahal said that anti-Semitism was only one of the motives under investigation and that there had been no problem of anti-Semitism "for dozens of years" in Uzbekistan. He said the neighborhood had been the recent scene of an increasing number of murders.

#9

The Upcoming G8 Summit in St. Petersburg: Challenges, Opportunities, and Responsibility

By Vladimir V. Putin

RIA Novosti, March 1, 2006

At the beginning of 2006, Russia assumed the G8 Presidency. We understand very well that this requires serious work and implies a great deal of responsibility. It is not the organizational activities alone that lie ahead. More importantly, we will need to discuss and jointly determine the priorities and substantive areas

of work for this highly respected forum, which has served as a key mechanism for coordinating approaches to meeting the most significant challenges of world development for more than thirty years.

We have suggested to our partners that we should focus on three serious and pressing issues: global energy security, combating infectious diseases, and education. These three priorities are oriented towards achieving an objective which we hope is clear to all our partners, namely improving the quality of life and living standards of the present and future generations.

The establishment of a reliable and comprehensive system of energy security is clearly one of the strategic goals for the G8 and the world community as a whole. Today, global energy is an important and true engine of social and economic progress. This is why it directly affects the well-being of billions of people around the globe.

During the Russian Presidency, not only will we seek to develop fundamental approaches to meeting current challenges in this field but also outline our coordinated policy for the long term.

Today, the lack of stability in the hydrocarbon markets poses a real threat to global energy supply. In particular, the gap between supply and demand continues to widen. The apparent increase in energy consumption in Asian countries is caused not only by market fluctuations but also by a host of other factors related to policy and security. In order to stabilize the situation in this field, coordinated activities of the entire world community are needed.

The new policy of the leading world countries should be based on the understanding that the globalization of the energy sector makes energy security indivisible. Our common future in the area of energy means common responsibilities, risks and benefits.

In our view, it is especially important to develop a strategy for achieving global energy security. It should be based on a long-term, reliable and environmentally sustainable energy supply at prices affordable to both the exporting countries and the consumers. In addition to reconciling the interests of stakeholders in the global energy interaction, we will have to identify practical measures aimed at ensuring sustainable access of the world economy to traditional sources of energy, as well as promoting energy-saving programmes and developing alternative energy sources.

A balanced and fair energy supply is undoubtedly a pillar of global security at present and in the years to come. We ought to pass on to the future generations a world energy architecture that would help avoid conflicts and counterproductive competition for energy security. This is why it is essential to find common approaches to creating a solid and long-term energy base for our civilization.

In this connection, Russia calls on the G8 countries and the international community to focus their efforts on developing innovative technologies. This could serve as an initial step in creating a technological basis for energy supply of mankind in the future, when the energy potential in its present form is exhausted.

Global energy security will also benefit from an integrated approach to enhancing energy efficiency of the social and economic development. The G8 made important progress towards elaborating it last year in Gleneagles, including, in particular, the adoption of the Plan of Action aimed at promoting innovation, energy saving and environmental protection. We find it crucially important to engage non-G8 countries, especially fast-growing and industrializing economies, in participating in the G8 initiatives and, particularly, in implementing the document adopted at Gleneagles.

The way most people see it, energy security has mainly to do with the interests of industrially developed countries. It should be kept in mind, however, that almost two billion people in today's world do not enjoy modern-day energy services, while many of them lack access to even electricity. Their access to many benefits and advances of civilization has been virtually blocked.

Needless to say, energy alone would not solve the poverty problem. At the same time, lack of energy resources throughout different regions significantly hinders economic growth while their unsustainable use may result in an ecological disaster on a global rather than local scale.

Lately, experts have been actively discussing ways of increasing energy use in developing countries through a more intensive development of non-conventional energy sources. And this is where assistance rendered by the G8 in developing and introducing alternative power facilities becomes ever so important.

Generally speaking, all of us should recognize and admit that “energy egoism” in a modern and highly interdependent world is a road to nowhere. Therefore Russia's attitude towards energy security remains clear and unchanged. It is our strong belief that energy redistribution guided wholly by the priorities of a small group of most developed countries does not serve the goals and purposes of global development. We will strive to create an energy security system sensitive to the interests of the whole international community. Basically all it takes is for the mankind to create a balanced potential in order to provide every State with sustainable energy supply, and international cooperation opens all avenues for that.

Throughout its history, the human race finds itself fighting against a genuine threat to its survival – that of the spread of infectious diseases. The progress made might seem encouraging: smallpox was eliminated once and for all throughout the world while fight against poliomyelitis is drawing to a close. Yet our times are also plagued by the outbreaks of both known and new and highly dangerous diseases such as AIDS, exotic viral hemorrhagic fever, microplasma infections, and bird flu. Today, infections account for every third death in the world. According to experts, in the years to come there is a high probability of a new strain of pandemic influenza that would claim millions of lives.

Russia would like to suggest the reactivation of efforts in this regard, including the adoption of a strategic action plan of the G8 to fight bird flu and prevent new human flu pandemics.

In general, the Group should not and must not stay indifferent to such enormous challenges as combating infectious diseases. The uneven development of health systems as well as unequal financial capabilities and scientific potential required to fight epidemics lead to uneven distribution of global resources allocated to the fight against infections.

Marked by a different degree of intensity in different regions, infectious diseases, working as a litmus test, expose social and economic problems, aggravate social inequality and contribute to discrimination. Thus, people infected with HIV and other dangerous diseases find themselves in an alarming situation as they are essentially marginalized and have to cope both with their disease and the difficulties of adapting to a full life in society.

There is another fundamental aspect. In recent years, our world has suffered the devastation of earthquakes, floods and tsunamis with increasing frequency. Urbanization, wider transport networks and industrial infrastructure make us much more vulnerable to these emergencies than before. They cause damage not only to the economy and social sphere; their heaviest toll is the outbreaks of infectious diseases, which claim thousands of lives. Therefore we view as another priority the establishment of a global system for natural disaster warning and mitigating their epidemiological consequences.

Thought might also be given to the possibility of creating a unified infrastructure capable of responding to the emergence and spread of epidemic in a prompt manner. This infrastructure must include a monitoring, information and scientific methodology exchange system that can promptly respond to emergencies.

The so-called humanitarian crises, in particular related to military conflicts, are the root cause of many large-scale diseases. As a result, the threat of effective disease area spread is increased many times over. I am convinced that the G8 will be able to consolidate international efforts in dealing with such emergencies and give a strong impetus to multilateral interaction in this area.

Of course, the G8 should continue to promote scientific capacity-building and pool together intellectual and material resources of the world community for the development of new safe vaccines and promising highly sensitive means to diagnose infectious diseases, as well as for the implementation of education and prevention programmes.

Our common tasks in the area of education deserve serious attention. In a post-industrial information society, education becomes a prerequisite for success in the daily life and a major input into the economic development. It is one of the most important elements of a growing social identity, moral values and stronger democracy. Moreover, as technologies improve, labor market favors higher-skilled specialists, and education requirements are constantly increasing as a result. Its goals and content are consequently changing. Today, possessing a certain amount of knowledge and skills is not enough; one has to be ready to constantly upgrade and adapt them to new requirements.

Access to global wealth of information dramatically changes education methodologies themselves. Transfer to continuous education is taking place now. Preconditions are in place to form a common education space. Certainly, these trends are gaining momentum, primarily in developing countries. At the same time, many nations and regions still face an acute problem of accessibility of even the basic education. We view this as a true "humanitarian disaster", as a serious threat to the world community. Widespread illiteracy is a breeding ground for the advocates of inter-civilizational strife, xenophobia and national and religious extremism, and in the final analysis for international terrorist activities.

In this context, it is important to formulate a wider and more systematic approach to education in both developing countries and the world at large. In particular, if the employment problem is to be successfully resolved, the notion of education must, as it seems, include not only general education but also vocational and technical training encompassing all levels of education, from basic to higher one.

In the conditions of growing mobility of world population and steady increase in migration, the problem of integration into a different cultural environment acquires special importance. Obviously, it is education that makes possible mutual social adaptation of various cultural, ethnic and confessional groups. Hence, special attention should be paid to upgrading education systems for the attainment of these goals both in developed and developing countries.

Many developing countries experience serious difficulties with introducing advanced education methods and information technologies. In this respect, it is necessary to make more efficient use of the most advanced resources, including the Internet and other newest means of information and knowledge distribution, in the field of education. A fruitful debate on this subject took place last November in Tunisia during the second stage of the World Summit on Information Society; we have been carefully reviewing the Summit outcomes and intend to use them.

Russia stands ready to assist in mobilizing the world community's efforts aimed at raising the quality and compatibility of requirements to professional education as a key condition for the use and propagation of innovations. All stakeholders in global economic development and the international labor market in general are interested in this. The responsiveness of educational institutions to the demands of high-tech sectors is a necessary precondition for the competitiveness of national economies.

Along with the three priorities on the agenda of the Russian Presidency mentioned above, the G8 will continue in 2006 its work on such key issues as the fight against international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Group will remain focused on the problems of development assistance as well as the prevention of environmental degradation and critical issues of the world economy, finance and trade. And certainly, as before, our efforts will remain focused on the settlement of regional conflicts, primarily in the Middle East and in Iraq, and on stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan.

We fully realize that not a single Presidency is capable of offering comprehensive solutions to the problems of the modern world being discussed by the G8. At the same time, from summit to summit, the Group is

getting a better vision of these problems and strives to find the most workable approaches to their solution through its joint efforts.

Russia is ready to contribute actively to further progress in this direction. Continuity and evolution - these words are the motto of the Russian Presidency that has commenced.

#10

US & Ukraine Conclude Bilateral WTO Accession Agreement On Market Access, Formal Signing March 6

Office of the United States Trade Representative, March 1, 2006

NEW DELHI - The United States and Ukraine have concluded bilateral negotiations on market access issues related to Ukraine's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession. Trade Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk will join U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman in Washington on March 6, 2006 to formally sign the agreement.

"This agreement marks a milestone for both countries in our bilateral trade relations. It confirms Ukraine's commitment to broad-based reform and economic liberalization. It also demonstrates Ukraine's resolve to join the international trading system," said U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman.

"As a result of these negotiations, we can expect greater bilateral cooperation on economic issues, and a strong boost to Ukraine's efforts to complete the accession negotiations."

BACKGROUND

Over the course of the negotiations, the Administration has consulted closely with the Congress about America's concerns and interests, most particularly Members and Staff of the House Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee and the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Congressional action is necessary to grant Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) to Ukraine. This will clear the way for the two countries to apply the WTO Agreement between them when Ukraine becomes a WTO member.

Ukraine has been negotiating its terms of accession to the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT), and then to the WTO, since 1994. Ukraine is still negotiating bilateral market access agreements with eight other countries. To complete its accession bid, Ukraine must complete those bilateral market access negotiations and also the multilateral negotiations on a Working Party Report and Protocol of Accession. Ukraine is also still in the process of enacting legislation that will enable it to apply WTO provisions after its accession.

The United States is continuing to work with other accession candidates, including Russia and Vietnam, and hopes to conclude these bilateral agreements in the near future.

#11

Opposition Candidate in Belarus Is Arrested and Beaten

By Steven Lee Myers

New York Times, March 2, 2006

MOSCOW, March 2 — Security officers in Belarus today arrested and beat a candidate running against President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, raising tensions ahead of a disputed presidential election scheduled for March 19.

The challenger, Aleksandr V. Kazulin, was released more than eight hours later, but not before his arrest prompted protests, scuffles with police and dozens more detentions during a series of confrontations in the capital, Minsk.

Gunfire erupted near a police station where he was taken, as police officers fired warning shots in an attempt to stop a car carrying his supporters and a photographer, according to the candidate's spokeswoman and the election observer mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

"Today it was shown that the president is extremely afraid of his own people," Mr. Kazulin said in a telephone interview after his release this evening. "We call on the world community to issue a strict protest against the fact that in the center of Europe a dictatorship is metastasizing."

The arrests marred an election campaign that the United States and Europe have already criticized as dubious given the pressure Mr. Lukashenko's government has exerted against his presidential opponents, their supporters and members of advocacy groups.

They came a day after the country's security chief warned in televised remarks that opposition leaders intended "to seize power by force" by staging violent election protests with the support of foreign nations, including the United States. Mr. Lukashenko reiterated that charge on today in a long address to the All-Belarussian People's Congress, a gathering of supporters designed to endorse his presidency.

"The Belarussian people have realized through their own experience that only dark forces are behind revolutions, regardless of the revolution's color," he said in televised remarks as transcribed and translated by the British Broadcast Service, referring to the popular uprising known as the "orange revolution" that followed fraudulent presidential elections in neighboring Ukraine in November 2004.

The arrest brought new foreign criticism against Mr. Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an increasingly iron fist since he was first elected in 1994, jailing political opponents, closing private advocacy organizations and suppressing independent newspapers.

The O.S.C.E.'s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which has sent observers to monitor the election campaign, said in a statement that the arrest followed a pattern of government pressure that reflected "a serious deterioration in the campaign atmosphere."

President Bush's national security adviser, Stephen L. Hadley, said today that the incident underscored the need for greater international condemnation of the government's behavior in advance of the election.

"We would like it to be free and fair, and a prerequisite of a free and fair election is that you don't beat up opposition candidates or opposition supporters and throw them in jail," he said in a briefing with reporters in New Delhi, where Mr. Bush was traveling, according to a White House transcript. "And we think that there is not enough outrage and international attention on Belarus generally — in the run-up to this election, in particular."

Mr. Kazulin was arrested, along with three campaign aides, after trying to register as a delegate for the congress this morning. The police barred him from entering a building where the registration was taking place, sparking a brawl that left Mr. Kazulin badly beaten, his face bruised, his lip broken and his shirt bloodied, according to his spokeswoman, Nina Shidlovskaya.

Several others were also beaten, including a Russian journalist for the local edition of Komsomolskaya Pravda and a television cameraman for Reuters, while the police seized and destroyed cameras and film of the initial arrests.

The police detained at least 20 people, including Mr. Kazulin's lawyer and journalists, outside the police station where he was eventually taken.

By evening, some had been released but not all, Ms. Shidlovskaya said. The atmosphere in the city remained tense into the night, as riot police confronted and arrested dozens more around the city and during a campaign rally held by the leading opposition candidate, Aleksandr Milinkevich, according to news reports and opposition spokespeople.

Mr. Kazulin said that he had been charged with disorderly conduct and hooliganism, though it was not yet clear when he would face a trial.

Mr. Kazulin, a former education minister and rector at the Belarus State University, is less well known than Mr. Milinkevich, who was elected as a unified democratic opposition candidate by a disparate array of parties and organizations. Mr. Kazulin, however, has emerged as fiercer and more confrontational than Mr. Milinkevich during the campaign.

Aligned more with Russia, which has tacitly supported Mr. Lukashenko, Mr. Kazulin has harshly denounced the government's actions and provoked confrontations during official events, like a ceremony last month to register candidates. During his detention today he smashed a framed portrait of Mr. Lukashenko at the police station.

He vowed to continue his campaign. "The country is rising up," he said in the telephone interview. "We will liberate Belarus from Lukashenko's yoke."

A fourth candidate, Sergei Gaydukevich, is a member of Parliament and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party who has allied himself with Mr. Lukashenko.

Mr. Milinkevich, who has risen significantly in independent polls, though he still trails Mr. Lukashenko, denounced Mr. Kazulin's arrest as "a flagrant violation" of the law and derided the election as "a farce."

"They realize that they cannot win an open, competitive struggle, so they do not stop violating the law and repressing their opponents."

#12

Kremlin takes aim at NGOs Even before new law takes effect, some say they're harassed By Alex Rodriguez
Chicago Tribune, March 3, 2006

NIZHNY NOVGOROD, Russia -- The Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, a Russian non-governmental organization that has performed humanitarian work in war-racked Chechnya since 2000, has seen its volunteers kidnapped and tortured. Four have been killed. Somehow, the society has survived and served as a lifeline for Chechens like Aset Makhamayeva.

Aset was 7 when a booby-trapped cigarette lighter she found on a Chechen village street exploded in 2003, destroying her hands and left eye. The society helped her obtain prostheses in Germany and then helped her move to Ireland with her mother and younger sister.

"She is such a clever girl, but in Chechnya she was doomed to vegetate," said Stanislav Dmitrievsky, the group's director. "In Russia, invalids are pariahs. But in Chechnya they are treated worse--they are vegetables."

Dmitrievsky and his group might find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to do that kind of work again. On Feb. 3, he was convicted of inciting ethnic hatred and sentenced to 4 years of probation for publishing commentaries by Chechen separatist leaders, a decision defended by NGOs in Russia and the West as an exercise in free speech.

That conviction was preceded by a government tax claim that construed the organization's grant proceeds as profit and an administrative charge that accused the group of failing to furnish originals of financial records. The group could not comply with the request because investigators in the tax case had already taken the records.

The onslaught has all but paralyzed Dmitrievsky's group, which has been a vital source for aid to Chechen families pummeled by more than a decade of war. The Western-funded society helps children maimed by mines and bombs rebuild their lives, channels food and clothing to refugees and exposes atrocities by Russian soldiers.

Dmitrievsky says the government's aim is simple: "To make the activities of certain NGOs illegal, to liquidate them."

A new Russian law imposing strict controls over foreign and domestic non-governmental organizations doesn't go into effect until April, but the government already is cracking down.

Russian authorities froze all assets of the Russian PEN Center, a writers' advocacy group, after accusing the group of failing to pay \$80,000 in taxes on land in Moscow that the group doesn't own, said the group's director, Alexander Tkachenko. The center gave authorities proof that the land is city-owned, but the appeal was ignored.

Authorities are also trying to shut down the Russian Human Rights Research Center, an association of some of Russia's more prominent NGOs, alleging that the group has not been filing annual reports required by law. The group's director, Lyubov Vinogradova, scoured the group's files and found receipts that showed government clerks had accepted the documents, but authorities remain unconvinced.

Underlying Russia's assault on NGOs is its assertion that Western governments are funneling millions of dollars into them to sow the kind of political upheaval that toppled Moscow-allied regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. After those uprisings, Russia accused the U.S. and other Western governments of supporting NGOs in those countries with money aimed at setting the stage for regime change.

KGB successor revved up

Russian leaders have made clear their concern over the prospect of Western interference in Russian affairs. In a Feb. 7 speech to leaders of Russia's Federal Security Service, the successor to the KGB, President Vladimir Putin urged the service to "protect society from any attempts by foreign states to use these organizations for interfering in Russia's internal affairs."

Earlier this year, the Kremlin suggested that the British were using intelligence operatives to secretly fund NGOs in Russia. The allegation came in the wake of a scandal involving Russian claims that British diplomats were using a communications device concealed in a fake rock near Moscow to conduct espionage.

The organizations singled out by the Russian government, prominent NGOs like the Moscow Helsinki Group and the Eurasia Foundation, vehemently denied the accusations, saying the grants they received from the British government were done transparently.

The Kremlin's crackdown on NGOs comes at a sensitive time for Russia, when it has assumed chairmanship of the Group of Eight club of industrialized democracies. NGO leaders in Russia, Western Europe and the U.S. have urged other G-8 countries to press the issue when talks begin.

Many observers believe Russia is worried not just about outside interference in its domestic affairs but also about the political effect NGOs have in exposing human-rights abuses.

Testifying before Congress on Feb. 8, Barry Lowenkron, head of the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, told lawmakers that the Russian government "harbors a deep mistrust of civil society and especially of organizations that receive foreign funding and are engaged in politically sensitive activities, like human-rights monitoring.

"As I told my Russian interlocutors, NGOs can support governments, they can criticize governments, but NGOs should never be treated as enemies of governments."

For now, the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society remains a top target. Last year, it received \$70,000 from the U.S. and \$131,000 from European governments, funding that has helped the group become known as one of the feistier watchdogs of abuses committed by Russian soldiers and pro-Moscow Chechen militias.

Chechen separatists' articles

In 2004, the group's Human Rights Defense newspaper published commentaries by Chechen separatist leaders Akhmed Zakayev and Aslan Maskhadov. Though the articles harshly criticized Putin and the Russian government, they were not directed at any ethnic group. Zakayev has obtained asylum in Britain; Maskhadov was killed in Chechnya last May.

More than a year later, authorities charged Dmitrievsky with inciting ethnic hatred by publishing the commentaries. The prosecutor in the case, Konstantin Moiseyev, would not answer questions about the case. According to the New York-based Human Rights First, Moiseyev relied on the testimony of an expert from a Russian Justice Ministry-linked legal center who said the articles could be interpreted as inciting ethnic or national hatred.

Coupled with the other government actions, the case has brought the society's work to a virtual standstill.

Under Russia's new NGO law, Dmitrievsky's conviction bars him from working for the society. And if he is convicted of any new crime, he could serve as long as 6 years in prison. The 39-year-old Russian says he has no plans to quit.

"Certainly, I can do this work without being an official member of the group," Dmitrievsky said. "Soon, we will see a dividing line between all Russian human-rights groups. Under pressure from the government, some will demonstrate their loyalty to the authorities. The rest will say, 'We won't be loyal, we won't work under your pressure,' and by the 2008 presidential election, those groups will be liquidated.

"I'm confident our organization will be in the second camp, and we will find some other way of working."

#13

Hamas, on Visit to Russia, Is Told It Must Accept Israel

By Steven Lee Myers

New York Times, March 3, 2006

MOSCOW, March 3 — The leaders of Hamas, the Islamic militant group elected to govern the Palestinians, began a high-profile, three-day visit to Russia today praising President Vladimir V. Putin for inviting them, only to receive a pointed warning that the organization had to accept the Israeli state and dismantle its militias or face isolation and irrelevancy.

The foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said that Russia would convey to Hamas a position shared by the United States and other international mediators in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, as well as, he said, by "most of the Arab capitals." He said Hamas needed to transform itself into a legitimate political movement on the model of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland.

"I don't think Hamas would have any serious future if Hamas doesn't change," Mr. Lavrov said in an interview with American news organizations, shortly before he met the Hamas delegation at the Foreign Ministry.

Mr. Putin's invitation, announced last month during a visit to Spain, surprised and angered officials in Israel and the United States, which have tried to isolate Hamas following its victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections. Russia has since sought to reassure them that it did not intend to diverge significantly from international peace efforts.

Hamas showed little interest in changing its position anytime soon. Hamas's leader, Khaled Meshal, said upon arrival here that the organization did not intend to revise its refusal to recognize Israel, adding that Israel was the main obstacle to peace in the region.

"In our opinion, the problem is not in the position of the Palestinian people, but in the occupation," Mr. Meshal, who lives in exile in Syria, said in televised remarks at the airport. "We are for peace in the region, which may become possible only after the end of the occupation."

#14

Demolition of the Synagogue in Dushanbe, Tajikistan NCSJ Statement, March 3, 2006

WASHINGTON, March 3 -- As you may be aware, the Dushanbe city government began tearing down the synagogue in that city on February 8. The planned demolition has been an ongoing issue for more than three years. The leadership of the synagogue was notified three years ago that the synagogue, and the surrounding non-Jewish buildings remaining in a largely cleared area, would be removed to build a road leading to the new Presidential Palace. Other structures torn down include a mosque and private homes.

The synagogue, built in the 1940s, was nationalized in the 1950s. Since the initial notification of demolition, the synagogue's Rabbi Mikhail Abdurahmonov has been in negotiations to either stop the demolition or to find a centrally located site to build a new synagogue. A difference in opinion exists about whether or not the Tajik government offered to build a new synagogue for the community. The Tajik government offered a plot of land that was rejected by the community because it was not easily accessible to the elderly Jewish community.

In the beginning of this year, Tajik government officials met again with the Jewish community to discuss various options. The negotiations were not successful and the planned demolition ensued. The synagogue leadership is seeking fair financial compensation from the city. The Jewish population of Tajikistan, made up primarily of Bukharan Jews and a small group of Ashkenazi Jews, is estimated at 250-300, with the majority living in Dushanbe. Anti-Semitism has not been a serious problem in Tajikistan. Humanitarian services continue to be provided by JDC and the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS.

NCSJ has been following the controversy closely and has been in contact with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Ambassador in Dushanbe, the Tajik Embassy in Washington D.C., the Israeli government, and Rabbi David Gurevich, Chief Rabbi of Uzbekistan. We have also consulted with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater New York, which is in regular contact with the Bukharan community in New York City.

We will continue to engage all the parties involved and to press for equitable compensation and a suitable site for a new synagogue to be built. We have also inquired about the status of the mosque and other properties. The remainder of the demolition is scheduled for June 2006.

Following is a statement issued by the Tajik Embassy in Washington D.C. on March 1:

EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN
1005 New Hampshire Ave., NW Washington D.C. 20037
Tel:(202) 223-6090/fax:223-6091

PRESS-RELEASE

First of and foremost, the Embassy of Tajikistan appreciates very much recent attention to needs and problems of our small Jewish community. Therefore, in reference to some anxiety around the question of relocation of a synagogue, the Mission would like to state the following;

According to reconstruction and development program of the downtown of Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, the city Authorities plan to build a National Mall, which would include executive buildings, other visiting sites and etc. For this purpose, Dushanbe Authorities had decided to relocate some buildings and facilities of the area, among them a neighborhood, which includes the Russian 201st Military Base and other very significant buildings.

It is also important to mention that this development project was discussed with respectable historians, architectures, and of course, religious scholars of the Jewish community, where the plan did find support and understanding. As the result of consultations, there is a conclusion that while the synagogue itself is a respected religious site, this state-owned building, built in the 30th of the last century as an ordinary single house, does not have architectural significance and historical value. Despite of it, the question of the relocation of the Jewish synagogue was among those, where the Authorities paid much attention in terms of religious feelings of the community. Moreover, the Embassy would like to highlight that neither the Government of Tajikistan, nor the Mayor's Office of Dushanbe had ever intended "to demolish" the building without the communities consent.

Consequently, because of sensitivity of the issue, the Mayor of Dushanbe had held consultations with the leaders of Jewish community during the years of 2004 and 2005, when they had come to a mutually agreed solution; According to that, the city's Authorities in exchange to the old and obviously collapsing building, would designate a location for the synagogue, and then would provide a piece of land for construction of a new, permanent synagogue. The offer, as we believe, is very practical for both sides; from one hand the Authorities would be able to continue the development project and from the other hand the Jewish community would have an opportunity to build a relevant and architecturally valuable house of worship. We truly think that if built, the new synagogue would be another pride example of mutual understanding, and furthermore, it would indeed lay a ground for thrive and progress of the community among the other religious confessions of Tajikistan.

At this moment, it is also appropriate to mention that Tajik and their Jewish community have lived in peace and accord since Biblical times. The Central Asia itself is among few World regions where the history doesn't know pogroms or hatred between indigenous population and Jewish communities. Therefore, today it's our policy and responsibility to preserve those relations for the future generations; that's why the outgoing harmful discussion concerns us very much. So, we highly value this small, but historically and culturally very important community. The relations that exist between Tajik and Bukharian Jewish in Central Asia will always be an example of coexistence and understanding between nations for years to come.

Released by Press-office of the Embassy of Tajikistan to the USA

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**Death of Jewish Leader In Tashkent, Uzbekistan
NCSJ Statement, March 3, 2006**

WASHINGTON, March 3 -- Avraham Yagudayev, the leader of the Bukharian Jewish community in Tashkent died on February 22 from injuries he received two days earlier. He was found severely injured on a road near the synagogue in Tashkent by his wife. According to the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Washington D.C., Yagudayev was the victim of a tragic car accident that was not related to his religion or nationality. An investigation is continuing and the driver of the car is being sought. Avraham Yagudayev was 33, the father of four, and the chairman of the synagogue in Tashkent.

NCSJ will continue to gather information concerning this investigation as well as the situation in Dushanbe.