



**WASHINGTON, D.C. February 22, 2008**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

**FROM: Edward B. Robin, Chairman;  
Lesley Israel, NCSJ President;  
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

In Brief: FEOR celebrates 10 year anniversary

Dear Friend:

I am writing you from Israel, at the conclusion of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations' annual mission abroad, and the start of the second International Conference of the Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism, which begins on Sunday. I will write more about my participation in this important event in next week's brief.

This past week, NCSJ Chairman Ed Robin and I, traveling with the Conference of Presidents from Tbilisi, Georgia to Israel, took a brief detour to Moscow, where we attended the Fourth Congress of the Federation of Russian Jewish Communities (FEOR), which was marking the tenth anniversary of its organization. Please see NCSJ's press release on the FEOR conference in this week's brief for more details.

In addition to attending FEOR's conference, we also had a briefing by a senior American embassy official, and consultations with NCSJ Board members and other Russian Jewish leaders. We were joined in Israel by NCSJ President Lesley Israel, where we heard from leading Israeli government, business, religions and educational leaders. Lesley will remain in Israel for the Global Forum.

Lastly, I also had the opportunity to see the [Beth Hatefutsoth museum's Soviet Jewry exhibition](#). It is a truly remarkable presentation and I urge anyone who is visiting Israel to make a special trip to the museum.

Sincerely,

Mark B. Levin  
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. February 22, 2008

-----INDEX OF ARTICLES-----

1. *NCSJ Attends Federation of Russian Jewish Communities' Conclave*  
NCSJ, February 19, 2008
2. *Political Heir Is Less Rosy Than Putin on the State of Russia*  
By C. J. CHIVERS  
New York Times, February 16, 2008
3. *Russia Warns It May Back Breakaway Republics in Georgia*  
By C. J. CHIVERS  
New York Times, February 16, 2008
4. *Angry Putin: Diplomats expelled on 'bogus evidence'*  
*Latvia sent Russians packing on British claims NATO secrets stolen*  
WorldNetDaily, February 20, 2008
5. *Russian Jewish community thriving after dark past*  
Russia Today, February 18, 2008
6. *Chief Russian Rabbi fears Kosovo independence will lead to instability worldwide*  
Interfax Religion, February 18, 2008
7. *What Keeps the Kremlin Up All Night*  
By Daniel Treisman  
The Moscow Times, February 18, 2008
8. *17 Killed in Hate Crimes*  
The Associated Press, February 18, 2008
9. *McCain Criticizes Putin*  
Reuters, February 18, 2008
10. *Rise in hate crimes alarms Russian experts*  
JTA Brief, February 19, 2008
11. *Nationalists Obsess Over Medvedev's Roots*  
By Alexander Osipovich  
The Moscow Times, February 20, 2008
12. *Moscow's Immigrants Face Wave of Skinhead Violence*  
By Michael Schwartz  
New York Times, February 20, 2008

13. *Russia Denies Visa to Rights Group Leader in Days Before Report*  
By CLIFFORD J. LEVY  
New York Times, February 21, 2008
14. *Public Must Be Allowed To Study Proposed Bills - Russia's Ombudsman*  
Itar-Tass, February 20, 2008
15. *Rumors that Putin's successor is Jewish has community worried*  
By Anshel Pfeffer  
Ha'aretz, February 22, 2008
16. *European Jewish leader calls for unity within his organization*  
European Jewish Press, February 19, 2008
17. *Jewish Gravesite believed found in E. Ukraine*  
JTA Brief, February 22, 2008
18. *Ukrainian minister vows to fight xenophobia*  
By Vladimir Matveyev  
JTA Brief, February 17, 2008
19. *Jewish children's home opens in E. Ukraine*  
JTA Brief, February 18, 2008
20. *Kazakhstan's OSCE presidency to be unique: OSCE/ODIHR Director*  
Kazinform, February 15, 2008
21. *Kyrgyzstan: New Effort Aggressively Counters Hizb Ut-Tahrir, Religious Extremism*  
By Bruce Pannier  
RFE/RL, February 15, 2008
22. *AZERBAIJAN: WASHINGTON, BAKU CONCERNED ABOUT PKK CELLS IN CAUCASUS*  
Ron Synovitz  
EurasiaNet Partner Post from RFE/RL, February 16, 2008
23. *Over 20,000 Rally Against Saakashvili*  
The Associated Press, February 18, 2008
24. *U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairmen Visit RFE/RL, Call for Kosovo Recognition*  
RFE/RL, February 19, 2008
25. *Kosovo's independence comes amid uncertainty*  
By Dinah Spritzer  
JTA, February 17, 2008
26. *For Leviev, All That Glitters Isn't Gold*  
*Protests in front of new diamond store here latest in string of bad news for billionaire*  
by Walter Ruby  
The Jewish Week, February 20, 2008

**#1**

**NCSJ Attends Federation of Russian Jewish Communities' Conclave**  
**NCSJ, February 19, 2008**

NCSJ Chairman Edward B. Robin and Executive Director Mark B. Levin represented American Jewry at the Fourth Congress of the Federation of Russian Jewish Communities (FEOR) on February 18, held at the Jewish Community Center at Marina Roscha in Moscow, Russia.

Chairman Ed Robin delivered remarks at the event, which celebrated the 10th anniversary of FEOR's operations in Russia. The Congress brought together a cross-section of Russia's Jewish community, as well as leaders from other former Soviet Union Jewish communities, numerous non-governmental organizations and the Russian government.

NCSJ congratulates FEOR on its 10-year anniversary.

## **#2**

### **Political Heir Is Less Rosy Than Putin on the State of Russia**

**By C. J. CHIVERS**

**New York Times, February 16, 2008**

The presumptive successor to President Vladimir V. Putin presented his platform for seeking Russia's highest office on Friday, giving a speech before business leaders in Siberia in which he vowed to continue Russia's economic revival, but also struck markedly liberal notes.

The speech by the candidate, First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri A. Medvedev, was a contrast to the public appearance only a day before by Mr. Putin, his sponsor. Mr. Putin was confrontational and sometimes caustic in what the Kremlin had billed as his final news conference as president.

On Thursday, Mr. Putin had sharply criticized the West and the United States, threatened to aim strategic missiles at Europe and said Russia would continue to develop its own, state-centered brand of democracy without instruction from outside.

Mr. Medvedev, speaking in Krasnoyarsk, a city near Russia's geographic center, spoke in softer tones, addressing Russia's middle class and small-business owners and embracing themes more often heard in the West.

"Freedom is better than nonfreedom," he said in his opening remarks, according to a transcript provided by his campaign. "These words are the quintessence of human experience."

Mr. Medvedev, the 42-year-old protégé of Mr. Putin, then elaborated. "The talk here is about freedom in all of its manifestations: about personal freedom, about economic freedom and at last about freedom of self-expression," he said. He added, "Freedom is inseparable from the actual recognition of the power of law by citizens."

He is the all-but-unchallenged front-runner in the presidential election set for March 2. He seems certain to inherit the formal reins of power from a president who, his critics say, has extinguished many elements of personal and political freedom in Russia and rolled others back.

Mr. Medvedev faces three weak candidates who critics of the Kremlin say have been allowed to run by Mr. Putin only to create the appearance of a contest. A poll released Friday predicted that Mr. Medvedev, who has been endorsed by Mr. Putin and was receiving lavish official support, could win as much as 80 percent of the vote.

The declarations about the universal values of freedom in an election that is being stage-managed, and in a speech before state journalists who are largely under the Kremlin's sway, immediately raised eyebrows among analysts and diplomats in the West.

But Mr. Medvedev pressed on, issuing an implicit and broad indictment of Russia's current state of civic affairs. He moved past the economic and political successes of Mr. Putin's eight years in power and focused on the country's deep and enduring problems.

The courts, he said, are riddled with corruption, the state bureaucracy is weighted by indifference, predatory officials and bloat, and Russia's business climate has been smothered.

"It is necessary to change radically the ideology of administrative procedures dealing with starting and holding a business," he said. An overhaul was required, he added, "to give realistic chances for the development of small businesses, which are drowning today in a swamp of official indifference and bribes."

Some of Mr. Medvedev's assessment echoed statements by Mr. Putin, including his denunciation of official corruption. But his picture of Russian society and its government veered from the rosier account provided by Mr. Putin at his final press conference before leaving office.

Mr. Putin had said, coolly and directly, that his administration had had no major failures during his two terms.

Western diplomats suggested that Mr. Medvedev's speech should not be taken entirely at face value.

Under Russia's Constitution, Mr. Putin cannot seek a third consecutive term. Mr. Medvedev is Mr. Putin's personally selected successor, and Mr. Putin has said that he will serve as Mr. Medvedev's prime minister and plans to wield power and to influence Russia's course for years to come.

"Medvedev in this speech and in previous speeches has been enunciating liberal themes, and that's encouraging," said Cliff Kupchan, a director at the Eurasia Group, a global risk consulting firm based in Washington and New York.

"But we have to remember that this entire campaign is being run by Putin, and Putinism, broadly meaning a large state role in the economy and an assertive foreign policy, is not going to change soon, because Putin is not going to leave the scene."

Mr. Kupchan suggested that Mr. Medvedev's candidacy, and the message of his platform, had been chosen by Mr. Putin and the Kremlin's political elite because improving Russia's reputation suited their needs.

"An image is being created for Mr. Medvedev that will smooth the way for Russian investors to invest abroad," he said. "That is very important to the Kremlin."

But Mr. Medvedev's speech also seemed tuned to the ears of Russia's expanding consumer class, which has seen its purchasing power and standard of living rise during the oil-and-gas boom that has buoyed Mr. Putin's years in power, but has seen its political rights decline and still faced an ossified government bureaucracy.

He pledged to improve the investment environment, amend the country's tax codes, and work to stabilize the ruble, whose value has crashed and risen since Soviet times — first evaporating many citizens' savings and recently spurring inflation and causing unease about escalating costs of living.

He said as well that "our schools would have the opportunity not to have one computer for 20 students," but Internet access at every desk.

And he warned, with candor, that the boom in Moscow and other population centers had not reached many Russians — a theme Mr. Putin has also noted.

Mr. Medvedev, like his sponsor, outlined a need for more attention to social programs and health care. "Part of the population is practically still socially comatose," he said. "They see neither opportunities nor prospects of improvement of their living standards. Hence, the drunkenness and a still very high level of suicide."

A senior American diplomat noted that Mr. Putin, early in his presidency, had pledged to make the country more democratic and to fulfill a broad agenda of social goals. The diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity as part of diplomatic protocol, added that it was much too soon to know whether Mr. Medvedev would even have the power as president to choose his own course, much less to realize the goals he had articulated in his speech.

“If you go back and look at early Putin, I would argue that you could find that Putin said a number of things that were promising,” he said. “On a number of elements he came up rather short.”

### **#3**

#### **Russia Warns It May Back Breakaway Republics in Georgia**

**By C. J. CHIVERS**

**New York Times, February 16, 2008**

Russia held a high-level meeting with the leaders of two breakaway republics in Georgia on Friday, and vowed to increase its support for the separatists if Kosovo declared its independence and was recognized by the West.

The meeting, coupled with vocal warnings in Russia’s Parliament that it would react strongly to a declaration of independence by Kosovo, threatened to push the Kremlin and the West into a fresh and potentially volatile standoff over the status of separatist territories in Georgia.

Kosovo is expected within days to declare its independence from Serbia, Russia’s traditional ally.

The Kremlin has long objected to the move, and even threatened to retaliate by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two breakaway regions it supports inside Georgia’s internationally recognized borders, as independent states.

Russia has in the past several years granted Russian citizenship to almost all residents in the separatist enclaves. In anticipation of further engagement with the regions, Sergey V. Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, met here with the presidents of the regions’ de facto governments.

Mr. Lavrov then issued a stern but vague statement saying Russia was prepared to expand its case diplomatically in the days ahead. “The declaration and recognition of Kosovar independence will make Russia adjust its line toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” he said in a statement.

Increasing financial assistance is among the steps Russia might take, he said.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia border Russia along the Caucasus ridge, and broke from Georgia after brief wars in the early 1990s. Their status has simmered as a source of contention and ethnic tension in the years since.

Both regions have declared self-rule, but in fact are managed as Russian protectorates. The standoffs, labeled “frozen conflicts,” have been sources of unsuccessful international mediation and worries of renewed fighting.

Georgia in recent years has strongly protested the Russian support, accusing the Kremlin of hypocrisy.

It has noted that Russia has supported separatists inside Georgia while holding Russia’s own sovereignty inviolable and waging a bitter war and counterinsurgency against separatists on the other side of the Caucasus ridge, in Chechnya.

The military, diplomatic and public relations campaigns in the region have all the while been layered with intrigue.

One of the most prominent fighters in the Abkhaz war against Georgia, for example, was Shamil Basayev, the Chechen separatist and terrorist who became Russia's most wanted man.

Georgian officials have said that Mr. Basayev's career as a terrorist began as a proxy in Abkhazia for Russia's secret services, and that his presence in the war was a mark of Kremlin sponsorship and duplicity. Mr. Basayev, the eventual architect of the worst acts of terrorism in post-Soviet Russia, died in 2006.

Since President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia rose to power in 2003 and vowed to unify the country, there have been occasional skirmishes and mortar and rocket barrages along the borders between the de facto regions and areas under federal control.

The latest meeting between Mr. Lavrov and Eduard Kokoity, the president of South Ossetia, and Sergei Bagapsh, the Abkhaz president, ended without a concrete plan for all of the steps ahead, Irina Y. Gagloyeva, a spokeswoman for the Ossetian government, said by telephone.

But she said that Mr. Lavrov pledged Russia's strong support, and the three sides did agree that any questions of the regions' own statehood would be raised incrementally if Kosovo was recognized by the West.

The first step, Ms. Gagloyeva said, would be to press Georgia to engage in negotiations at the presidential level to lead to a step-by-step settlement of the lingering disputes.

"We see Kosovo as a precedent that attracts attention to our problem," she said. "It is a very serious problem of the unrecognized state, to which the big powers and major international organizations have a biased approach."

#### **#4**

**Angry Putin: Diplomats expelled on 'bogus evidence'  
Latvia sent Russians packing on British claims NATO secrets stolen  
WorldNetDaily, February 20, 2008**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has stepped up his attacks on Britain by accusing its foreign intelligence agency of feeding Latvia's secret intelligence chief with "bogus evidence" that has led to three Russian diplomats being expelled from the country. The former Soviet Republic now is part of NATO and the diplomats were accused of stealing sensitive military NATO secrets.

The Kremlin has ordered Russian newspapers to mount a media blitz on Latvia's spy agency, SAB, and its British-born director, the burly Janis Kazocins. His liking for English-cut country tweeds and a clipped accent marks him out as a graduate of Sandhurst, Britain's training academy for the army. The son of Latvian refugees to Britain in the post-World War II era, he had been born in the industrial town of Peterborough in the Midlands.

Kazocins had a distinguished career in the army, rising to become a full-blown general who served in Northern Ireland and was a key NATO planner for the first Gulf War. He went on to become military attache at the British Embassy in the Latvian capital, Riga.

In an unexpected move, he resigned his position in 2003 and was appointed by the Latvian government to become head of SAB – an appointment that caused a political scandal in the country. He was forced to renounce his British citizenship and take a Latvian language test.

But Moscow denounced his appointment as being orchestrated by Sir John Scarlett, the head of MI6. The chief of the Secret Intelligence Service is renowned for his recruitment skills.

Putin's own security service, FSB, has continued to claim Kazocins still is taking orders from MI6. The newspaper Moskovskie Novosti this week published a virulent attack on the 56-year-old Latvian spy chief claiming he is "controlled by MI6."

But the expulsion of the three Russian diplomats, insists Kazocins, resulted from his own security service conducting an "independent operation which caught the diplomats red-handed trying to steal NATO secrets."

Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin is the premium, online intelligence news source edited and published by the founder of WND.

## **#5**

### **Russian Jewish community thriving after dark past Russia Today, February 18, 2008**

After years of mass emigration Russian Jews are returning home in increasing numbers. Persecution in Tsarist Russia and then the Soviet Union led many to leave for Israel and the U.S. But those who've made the decision to come back say Russia is now more tolerant and prosperous.

Pre-revolution Russia was, at its height, home to the largest Jewish population in the world. Now there are officially just 300,000 following Judaism.

Such a dramatic decline in less than 150 years is the result of the anti-Semitism prevalent in the country's past. It started under Tsar Aleksandr the Second in the 1880s but it was during the Soviet Union, under Stalin, when the Jewish faithful faced particularly harsh treatment.

Russian Jewish emigres took advantage of exit visas, fleeing for Israel, the U.S., and Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. This exodus didn't stop with the collapse of Communism either. At its peak between 1989 and 2000 more than a million Russian Jews left to set up home in Israel.

When President Putin came to power at the start of the 21st century there was a shift in thought and deeds. He talked about the need to offer support and solutions for Jewish issues and concerns.

At one time Russian emigres made up almost a third of Israel's population. Now thousands each year are returning to the country of their birth. "It's a unique historical period. Many new communities have been established, many schools, cultural centres and synagogues have been built. Thousands of people have joined the faith, after being taken away from it all their lives," said Aleksandr Boroda of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia.

## **#6**

### **Chief Russian Rabbi fears Kosovo independence will lead to instability worldwide Interfax Religion, February 18, 2008**

Kosovo's secession from Serbia could set an example and prompt other countries to start a process of internal division, Russia's chief rabbi Berel Lazar said.

"Today it is Kosovo, tomorrow it will be someone else or Kosovo itself will be divided in two, and there will be no end to this process," Lazar told a press conference in Moscow on Monday.

Abiding by the principle of nation's integrity must be one of the fundamental norms of international relations, he said.

"When everyone starts saying "we want sovereignty," what is going to happen then?" the chief rabbi said.

"A totally wrong approach" was chosen in deciding on the status of Kosovo, Lazar said. At the same time he stressed that the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia itself does not comment on political issues.

**#7**

## **What Keeps the Kremlin Up All Night**

**By Daniel Treisman**

**The Moscow Times, February 18, 2008**

To observers of Russia's election campaign, one thing is clear: The Kremlin's political operatives do not want to leave anything to chance.

Of eight would-be opposition candidates, all but three have been driven out, either disqualified or discouraged from running. National television reports with breathless excitement on every movement of the Kremlin favorite, First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Lest anyone miss the point, polling stations have been told to hang posters accusing Medvedev's rivals of filing fraudulent income declarations. Before the State Duma elections in December, governors were reportedly ordered to deliver at least 65 percent of the vote for United Russia, and there is no reason to think such pressures have stopped.

All this raises the perplexing question -- Why? As numerous opinion polls show, President Vladimir Putin and his team are genuinely popular. It seems certain Medvedev would win decisively even in a completely fair vote without Kremlin insiders leaning their thumbs, toes and other body parts on the scale.

The government's popularity is no surprise. Under Putin, real wages have tripled and unemployment has fallen sharply. Given the booming economy, it would take some hard work for a Kremlin candidate to lose. Even if Russia had plunged this January into a financial crisis as severe as August 1998, simulations suggest this would not have threatened Medvedev's lead.

So why is the Kremlin doing everything possible to undermine the legitimacy of an election in which its own candidate is set to triumph?

First, it might be simple paranoia. It is hard to believe Kremlin insiders genuinely think opposition candidates Garry Kasparov or Mikhail Kasyanov could have won if they been allowed to run in an open contest. But with an administration as secretive as this one, nothing can be ruled out.

Another possible reason the Kremlin is messing with elections is because that is what the siloviki and political operatives like to do. They see no downside in doing so, and they enjoy it. Scolding the West is a badge of honor for them. Cutting off its nose to spite its face, the administration chooses to tarnish its international reputation because it views the election monitors and the democracy-rating industries of Washington and Strasbourg as the preserve of anti-Russian hypocrites with self-serving agendas.

A third possibility is that the Kremlin's election management is not about the voters at all; rather, it aims to keep the pro-Kremlin elite in line. Much has been made of the conflicts between silovik clans that have been arresting or investigating each other's agents and leaking to the press. To impose discipline on this fractious band, especially as he attempts to hop from one seat to another, Putin needs to demonstrate total control of the political machinery. Permitting even minor challenges might be viewed by some as a weakness, which would mean increased vulnerability.

Thus, the Kremlin may instruct governors to manage the votes not because the victory is in doubt, but to verify which governors are loyal and effective servants. Once they have dirtied their hands manipulating local elections, the governors are also less likely to metamorphose into anti-Kremlin campaigners for openness and liberal democracy.

A similar logic may hold for Medvedev himself. Were he to win an honest election, he might construe this as conferring a personal mandate. It is in the interest of Medvedev's associates -- one in particular -- to keep

him weak and dependent. Discrediting his election may be a way to keep Medvedev from getting ideas above his station.

Perhaps the Kremlin operatives are looking ahead to future contests. Open elections are not just about picking a winner. They allow new political personalities to emerge and grab attention. In many countries, losers from one election return refreshed to fight the next -- for example, Senator John McCain in the U.S. primaries. The goal in 2008 may be to keep the field empty and ensure no credible opposition candidates are waiting in the wings in 2012.

Finally, the Kremlin's determination to obtain by trickery what it could win fair and square may relate to economics, not politics. Although Putin dismisses allegations that he has amassed a personal fortune, it is no secret that some of his friends and acquaintances have become extremely wealthy. The next few years are crucial for Putin's inner circle; they face the task of rapidly privatizing the state assets they now control. The point of heavily managed elections -- and managed democracy in general -- may be to prevent revelations in the press and attacks by political rivals that might jeopardize the consolidation of this business empire.

My guess is that the true explanation combines several of these factors. But the economic interests seem increasingly dominant. Kremlin insiders appear to view political controls as a necessary complement to their use of law enforcement to win business battles.

If so, they have missed an important point about democracy -- in the long run, it can be the most effective way to protect the interests of insiders. Clear, honestly enforced rules of political competition favor those who have the resources and experience to win at such games. Even in the most democratic systems, insiders can usually tilt the rules in their favor. Fair competition between political parties can occur within the limits of a basic agreement on respecting the core interests of the wealthy -- or even, in some countries, on a certain level of protection for the security services.

The alternatives are less predictable. If politics is forced out of public institutions, it spills out onto the streets. The administration is right to fear mass demonstrations, not because Kasparov's supporters are likely to storm the Kremlin, but because there comes a point, as demonstrations grow, at which individuals all along the "power vertical" start to reevaluate their positions. During the August 1991 coup attempt, Generals Pavel Grachev and Yevgeny Shaposhnikov chose not to follow the orders of the organization that tried to implement the putsch, the State Committee for a State of Emergency, as did various second and third-level officers. Such sudden changes of perspective among their mid-level subordinates are what should keep the Kremlin's strategists awake at night.

**#8**

### **17 Killed in Hate Crimes**

**The Associated Press, February 18, 2008**

Seventeen people have been killed and more than 50 others injured in Russia since the beginning of the year in the latest outbreak of hate crimes, the Sova Center said Friday.

"This is a lot," said Sova deputy director Galina Kozhevnikova, adding that 11 of the 17 killings were committed in Moscow.

During all of 2007, 67 people were killed and more than 550 injured across the country in ethnically motivated attacks, according to the annual report by Sova. The figure represented a 13 percent increase over the previous year, with hate crimes growing increasingly brutal and deadly, the report said.

If the crimes were to continue at the same rate throughout the year, 2008 would see a total of 135 hate killings -- double the number recorded in 2007.

Kozhevnikova said the latest outbreak could be a response to authorities' recent attempts to get tougher on hate crimes, which have been on the rise across Russia in recent years.

"This is an indication of the organized nature of ethnically motivated attacks," Kozhevnikova said.

Another reason for the outbreak, she said, was this year's unusually warm winter in Moscow.

Moscow prosecutor's office said Friday that it had recorded 16 crimes on ethnic grounds in the city since the beginning of 2008, RIA-Novosti reported.

All the crimes were committed by groups of youths, aged 12 to 19, who attacked their victims from behind with knives, said the prosecutor's office's investigative department chief, Valery Spasenykh, RIA-Novosti reported.

Rights activists have said that the authorities, who earlier came under criticism for doing little to combat xenophobia, have been making efforts recently to investigate hate crimes more thoroughly and take such cases to court.

Some activists say, however, that the extreme nationalist sentiments are an outgrowth of the Kremlin's attempts to rebuild a strong state. President Vladimir Putin has publicly condemned the rise of hate crime, xenophobia and neo-Nazism and called on prosecutors to do more to fight extremism.

## **#9**

### **McCain Criticizes Putin**

**Reuters, February 18, 2008**

In a blistering critique, U.S. Republican presidential candidate John McCain has accused President Vladimir Putin of preparing to lead a puppet government.

The Arizona senator, long critical of Putin, had harsh words for the president as he prepares to give up the Kremlin to a hand-picked successor, Dmitry Medvedev, and then take on the post of prime minister.

"I think that Mr. Putin is trying to restore the old Russian empire. Obviously he is perpetuating himself in power in Russia virtually indefinitely by this setup of having basically a protege, someone who is doing his bidding as president while he serves as the prime minister," McCain said Friday.

"We knew the puppet show was going on, we just didn't know who the puppet was," he said.

McCain, who was asked about the state of affairs in Russia during a town-hall meeting, is seeking the Republican Party's nomination to face the Democrats' choice in November's election to succeed President George W. Bush. McCain said he was concerned about Russia but not worried about a resurgent Russian empire. "I'm not concerned that we will see a re-ignition of the old Cold War. Russia doesn't have the assets or the capability or anything else to pose the kind of challenge" that it did during the days of the Soviet Union, he said. McCain said Russia was blocking U.S. efforts to contain Iran and help in the Darfur region of Sudan.

## **#10**

### **Rise in hate crimes alarms Russian experts**

**JTA Brief, February 19, 2008**

Hate crimes have risen dramatically in Russia this year, worrying experts about an organized campaign of attacks.

There were 17 people killed in ethnically related attacks so far in 2008, according to the Moscow-based SOVA Center, a human rights organization that conducts sociological research on nationalism and racism in

Russia. This represents a 13 percent increase over the rate of ethnically based murders in the previous year and, if the trend continues, would result in a doubling of the total rate of ethnically biased murders in the country, The Associated Press reported. In 2007, 67 people were killed and more than 550 injured in hate attacks.

At the same time, anti-Semitism in Russia has stayed at historic lows.

Galina Kozhevnikova, SOVA's deputy director, told the AP that the increase in attacks could be part of a response to authorities' recent efforts to prosecute hate crimes more stringently. All of the attackers have been between ages 12 and 19 and have attacked their victims from behind with knives, Kozhevnikova said.

"This is an indication of the organized nature of ethnically motivated attacks," Kozhevnikova said.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled with racially motivated violence, the vast majority of it directed at immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

## **#11**

### **Nationalists Obsess Over Medvedev's Roots**

**By Alexander Osipovich**

**The Moscow Times, February 20, 2008**

Nikolai Bondarik fears that there will be dire consequences for Russia if the heavily favored front-runner in the presidential election, First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, wins as expected on March 2.

With Medvedev in power, Russia's natural resources will be plundered by foreign investors, Moscow will alienate its traditional Arab allies, and tens of thousands of Israelis will become managers at key Russian institutions, "including the police, army and secret services," Bondarik said by telephone from St. Petersburg.

The reason for Bondarik's alarm: He is firmly convinced that Medvedev is Jewish.

"We are categorically against him because he is an ethnic Jew and does not conceal his sympathies toward Judaism," said Bondarik, leader of the St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Party, an unregistered nationalist organization.

The conspiracy theory that Jews are plotting to seize power has always enjoyed an illustrious place in the history of Russian nationalism -- and it surfaced again when Medvedev, a candidate whose perceived Western leanings are distasteful to many nationalists, became the prohibitive favorite to succeed President Vladimir Putin.

There is no hard evidence that Medvedev has Jewish roots, and a spokeswoman for his campaign declined to answer a question about the subject.

Medvedev himself told Itogi magazine this week that he was baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church at age 23. He has never made any public comments about whether or not he has ethnically Jewish ancestors.

As many would also argue, a candidate's ethnic background should not really be an issue.

Still, nationalist web sites are rife with speculation that Medvedev might be Jewish, largely based on his mother's maiden name and patronymic, which could indicate either Russian or Jewish roots.

In December, the month Putin backed Medvedev as his successor, the Yandex search engine got 4,699 queries on "Medvedev Jew" after receiving only six in November. On the Russian version of Google, the top 10 queries beginning with "Medvedev" include "Medvedev Jew" and "Medvedev Visited Synagogue."

Many "patriots" -- as Russian nationalists call themselves -- do not share the view that Medvedev is Jewish, said Alexander Prokhanov, editor of the nationalist newspaper Zavtra.

"I regard these as attempts to demonize Medvedev among the anti-Semitic elements of the patriotic movement," Prokhanov said. "Many patriots are not anti-Semites."

Nationalists often accuse politicians they dislike of being Jewish, whether or not there is any basis to it, said Nikolai Propirny, executive vice president of the Russian-Jewish Congress, one of Russia's two Jewish umbrella groups.

Medvedev is simply the latest in a string of post-Soviet leaders to be labeled Jewish, following similar accusations against Putin and Boris Yeltsin in extremist publications, Propirny said.

"In his choice of clothing and his manner of speaking, he creates the impression of a Westernizer -- or, as [nationalists] put it, a democrat," Propirny said. "This arouses their antipathy and, naturally, leads to accusations that he is Jewish."

In the Soviet era, there were rumors that Vladimir Lenin and Yury Andropov had Jewish roots. The theory that a Jewish conspiracy stands behind attempts to reform Russia dates back to at least 1903, when the newspaper Znamya published "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a document later proved to be a forgery produced by the tsarist secret police.

Today's visitors to nationalist web sites target Medvedev's perceived liberal politics as much as his possible Jewishness.

"Whether he is a Jew or not, one thing is clear: He will be even worse than Putin," one visitor wrote on the web site of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, a nationalist group best known by its Russian initials, DPNI.

"This was immediately clear from his comments about giving non-Russians access to our oil, gas and metals and putting them on the free market ... which received a standing ovation from the West," the DPNI visitor said.

Bondarik, the St. Petersburg nationalist, echoed the same arguments but said it was "common knowledge" that Medvedev's mother was identified as ethnically Jewish on her Soviet passport. He has tried to organize anti-Medvedev street protests three times since December, but the city government would not give him permission, he said.

In the 1990s, Bondarik was convicted of assault and served a five-year prison sentence. He claims that the charges were fabricated.

Medvedev has aroused suspicion from nationalists like Bondarik by publicly meeting with Jewish leaders. In December, during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Medvedev met with Chief Rabbi Berl Lazar and criticized xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Lazar is considered the country's head rabbi by the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, which competes with the Russian-Jewish Congress for the title of being Russia's main Jewish umbrella organization. The RJC recognizes Adolf Shayeveich as chief rabbi.

Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, the federation's executive director, said Medvedev had friendly relations with Jewish leaders and stressed that his ethnic background was irrelevant.

"It is up to Mr. Medvedev himself to define his own nationality and his own religious faith, which I think he does," Berkowitz said. "The most important thing for us is that he protects all national minorities and all religious faiths."

Many experts believe that a Jewish candidate would have trouble getting elected to the post of president, even though anti-Semitism has been declining gradually. When Mikhail Fradkov was appointed prime minister in 2004, he was widely seen as an unlikely successor to Putin in part because of his Jewish background.

That may be behind Medvedev's reluctance to comment on the rumor that he is Jewish, since even a denial would provoke further speculation, said Vladimir Pribylovsky, head of the Panorama think tank.

"If he reacts to it, then everybody will print that information, including major media outlets," Pribylovsky said.

There is no hard evidence that Medvedev has any Jewish background, and all the speculation seemed to be guesswork based on names, said Pribylovsky, who maintains a database of information about Russian politicians.

As Medvedev told Itogi this week, his mother's maiden name was Shaposhnikova and his maternal grandfather was named Veniamin Shaposhnikov, while his maternal grandmother's surname was Kovalyov. Both the Shaposhnikovs and Kovalyovs came from villages in the Belgorod region, in southern Russia.

Shaposhnikov, derived from the Russian word for "hat maker," and Kovalyov, derived from the Ukrainian word for "blacksmith," were surnames among both Russians and Jews during the tsarist era.

While some nationalists have pointed out that "Veniamin," the Russian version of "Benjamin," is a common Jewish name, it was also once popular among Russian peasants.

In the Itogi interview, which was paid for by Medvedev's campaign, the candidate did not say whether any of his mother's relations were ethnically Jewish or Russian.

He did reveal, however, that his great-grandfather, Vasily Kovalyov, was a blacksmith who bore a resemblance to Tsar Nicholas II, and Itogi provided an old photograph of the Kovalyov family with Vasily standing in the center.

Medvedev also confirmed that his grandfather, Veniamin Shaposhnikov, was, indeed, a hat maker.

## **#12**

### **Moscow's Immigrants Face Wave of Skinhead Violence**

**By Michael Schwartz**

**New York Times, February 20, 2008**

In response to a wave of recent skinhead attacks on non-Slavs in Moscow, city government officials sat down with representatives of ethnic diasporas on Monday for a tense meeting during which leaders from the Azeri, Kyrgyz and other communities accused law enforcement bodies of harboring sympathy for violent nationalists and for failing to adequately investigate and prosecute hate crimes.

In the past year, "50 coffins of those killed in Russia at the hands of nationalists have come home to Azerbaijan," Vremya Novostei reported, citing Soyun Sadykov, the leader of an Azeri cultural organization in Moscow. Another 30 coffins have gone to Georgia and over 100 have returned to Central Asian countries like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Mr. Sadykov said.

Denis Kislov, the editor of the Central Asian news portal Fergana.ru, blamed the Russian government for provoking attacks on foreigners by passing anti-immigrant legislation, which, he said, many Russians have interpreted as "a call for action," Gazeta reported.

Vladimir Pronin, Moscow's police chief, deflected the criticism with his own statistics, redirecting the attack on immigrants themselves, the Vremya Novostei. Though 5,000 crimes were committed against non-

Russians in 2007, he said, immigrants from countries in Russia's "near abroad" — the former Soviet republics with deep ties to Russia — committed 14,000.

Police claimed on Monday to have shut down between 7 and 12 nationalist groups suspected of attacking foreigners in Moscow, Vesti television reported.

The groups' members, many of whom were teenagers, often stalked their victims on commuter trains in the Moscow region and videotaped the attacks, "in order to show them to whoever ordered the acts," said Vyacheslav Zakharenkov, a police spokesman. He added that violence on public transport had decreased in the last year.

Also on Monday, a Moscow court sentenced the leader of a violent nationalist group to three years in prison for agitating inter-ethnic discord, Gazeta reported. Maxim Martsinkevich, a 23-year-old nationalist better known as the hatchet, disrupted a political debate at a Moscow club in February last year, shouting "Sieg Heil!" and threatening to "kill the liberals, who hate nationalists." He was only arrested over the incident the following summer.

News of arrests and convictions has not calmed the nerves of Moscow's immigrant population, however. Another Azerbaijani cultural leader told Vremya Novostei that many of the Azeri elite have been leaving Moscow out of fear.

"I don't trust the authorities," Aibek Baratov a member Zhash Tolkun, a Kyrgyz youth group in Moscow, told Moskovsky Komsomolets. The group plans to begin holding demonstrations to protest the rash of violence.

At least seven Kyrgyz citizens have been killed in Moscow since January 1, a trend Paul Goble discussed in a post to his Window on Eurasia blog on Monday.

A group of young people attacked two men from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow on Saturday, Komsomolskaya Pravda reported, killing one and severely injuring the other.

A Tajik citizen was stabbed to death last Thursday, the English-language Moscow Times reported on Monday. The same day, anti-extremist activists guarding a gay rights flash mob in central Moscow clashed with a group of skinheads, the newspaper reported, citing the Sova Center, a hate crime monitoring group.

A Russian gay rights group also reported the incident on its website. The reports said that a teenage boy was stabbed during the brawl.

The violence has not been confined to only Moscow. A group of alleged skinheads attacked five guest workers from Tajikistan in Kaliningrad on Sunday, Komsomolskaya Pravda reported. As of Monday, all five men remained in local hospitals, though none appeared to have life-threatening injuries, the newspaper reported.

"They jumped us from behind," Bakhtier Ikromov, one of the victims, said. "The beating lasted for about a minute and then the skins disappeared."

## **#13**

### **Russia Denies Visa to Rights Group Leader in Days Before Report**

**By CLIFFORD J. LEVY**

**New York Times, February 21, 2008**

Human Rights Watch released a report here on Wednesday accusing the Kremlin of using a host of bureaucratic rules to hinder the work of nonprofit organizations. The group did not have to look far to find what it said was a fresh example of the problem: Its own executive director was denied a visa to come to Moscow to present the report.

The executive director, Kenneth Roth, who is based in New York, instead addressed a news conference in Moscow by telephone, noting that this was the first time that the Russian government had refused to issue a visa to an official of Human Rights Watch since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Referring to nongovernmental organizations, Mr. Roth said, "This is an unfortunate illustration of precisely the kind of harassment of NGOs that we have documented."

The Russian Foreign Ministry would not comment on the visa denial.

Human Rights Watch said in its report, "Choking on Bureaucracy," that although the Kremlin had pushed through tighter regulations in 2006, it had not conducted a broad-based campaign to close nonprofit organizations, as some had feared. Instead, officials have forced the organizations to comply with the regulations' onerous requirements, making it difficult for them to operate, the report said. And it emphasized that groups that scrutinized Kremlin policies or were opposed to them tended to receive the harshest treatment.

The report said that under the 2006 rules, organizations typically must seek government approval to take on additional responsibilities or conduct new activities. Yet officials can withhold permission if the extensive paperwork that is now mandated has been prepared "in an inappropriate manner," a category so broad that it can include minor typographical errors.

Russian officials have defended the way they regulate the organizations, saying that the rules are no harder to comply with than those in Western European countries. Human Rights Watch disputed that assertion and said studies by international experts had found that the Russian laws were particularly restrictive.

The nonprofits include not only domestic groups, but also offices of international organizations.

#### **#14**

#### **Public Must Be Allowed To Study Proposed Bills - Russia's Ombudsman Itar-Tass, February 20, 2008**

Russia's human rights commissioner, Vladimir Lukin, believes that the public at large should be allowed to scrutinize proposed legal acts before they are adopted and take effect.

"Time is ripe for solid monitoring, to be conducted at all levels, including that through parliamentary inquiries and parliamentary hearings," Lukin told the Federation Council (upper house), which discussed the condition of Russian legislation on Wednesday.

He recalled that President Vladimir Putin earlier pointed to the need for all-round consultations with the public.

"A state where laws are adopted, and a state ruled by law are two very different things," Lukin said. "We have been talking so much about the need for turning Russia into a state ruled by law."

The ombudsman said he was receiving many complaints against faulty judicial procedures, including those concerning criminal cases. The number of complaints from Russia filed at the European court keeps piling with every single year, he said.

Last year the European Court looked into 200 complaints. Russia paid a total of two million euros of damages.

This situation, Lukin said, is fraught with a very low degree of trust towards the Russian judicial system. Consequently, there emerged the problem of mob law, supported by a large share of society.

The chief of the presidential experts department, Arkady Dvorkovich, too, called for public examination of proposed legal acts, including government resolutions.

"Such examination must be transparent to the maximum extent. It must be held in regions and at the municipal level," he said.

## **#15**

### **Rumors that Putin's successor is Jewish has community worried**

**By Anshel Pfeffer**

**Ha'aretz, February 22, 2008**

The Jewish community of Russia is worried over a rumor campaign by nationalist parties claiming that Dmitri Medvedev, President Vladimir Putin's handpicked successor, is Jewish.

Russian Jewish leaders declined to comment on the rumors officially, fearing to lend them credibility. Off the record, however, one said: "I pray it isn't true, because it would only make trouble, for him and for us."

Medvedev, who recently told a Russian weekly that he was baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church at age 23, has not commented on these rumors. But Russian Internet sites are full of reports about his alleged Jewish roots.

The rumors are based in part on the fact that his maternal grandfather's first name was Veniamin - similar to the Hebrew Binyamin (Benjamin) - while his family name, Shaposhnikov, is sometimes a Jewish name. But beyond that, accusing an electoral rival of being Jewish is a tactic that nationalist parties have employed in the past, both in Russia and in other former communist countries.

Nikolai Bondarik, who heads the St. Petersburg branch of the nationalist Russian Party, told the Moscow Times on Wednesday "we are categorically against him [Medvedev] because he is an ethnic Jew and does not conceal his sympathies toward Judaism." He also charged that with Medvedev in power, foreigners and Jews would plunder Russia's natural resources; "tens of thousands" of Israelis would be given key positions in bodies such as "the police, army, and secret services"; and Russia's relations with the Arab world would be destroyed.

The Russian Party, which is considered anti-Semitic, is not running in the March 2 presidential election. Due to both Putin's backing and the disqualification of several opposition candidates, Medvedev's victory in the balloting is virtually certain.

Medvedev visited the Jewish Community center in Moscow during the Hanukkah holiday in December, just three days before Putin anointed him as his preferred successor. Thus all the television reports of the new heir presumptive included shots of him surrounded by leaders of the Jewish community, with Hanukkah candles and a Torah in the background.

Jewish community leaders said that Medvedev's visit and the good will he radiated during it encouraged them to hope that his presidency will be good for the community. "Medvedev will be wonderful for the Jews," just as Putin was, declared Israeli-Russian businessman Lev Leviev, who heads the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia.

Yet off the record, several said they feared this good will could create a backlash that would strengthen anti-Semitic currents in Russia.

Asked about Medvedev's alleged Judaism, they declined comment, beyond noting that he identifies himself as a Russian Orthodox Christian.

"The irony," said one, "is that we're doing everything possible to bring Jews back to Judaism, but in this particular case, with the next president, it would be better for the Jewish community if he did not identify himself as Jewish, so as not to draw fire."

## **#16**

### **European Jewish leader calls for unity within his organization European Jewish Press, February 19, 2008**

The head of the European Jewish Congress, Russian Moshe Kantor, has called all affiliated Jewish communities for unity, one week after three countries left the Jewish body to protest a vote extending retroactively the president's term limits.

France, Austria and Portugal suspended their membership in the European Jewish body after an extraordinary general assembly in Paris extended term limits of Kantor's presidency from 2 to 4 years.

In the meantime, a fourth country, Germany, also announced its decision to leave the EJC over the controversial vote.

In a statement issued on Monday, the Central Council of Jews in Germany condemned "the methods of EJC President Moshe Kantor" as "deeply disturbing."

In a letter to the EJC's 42 affiliated Jewish communities, Moshe Kantor stated: "I can assure you that no efforts will be spared in rebuilding the unity of our organization. We recommend establishing, without delay, a reconciliation commission, composed of 5 or 6 members of our organization, in order to solve this issue."

"We sincerely hope to achieve unity and continue our work as one family, since we don't have the privilege to do otherwise."

He added: "We are one: what binds us is much more important than the differences that can occur from time to time."

He said the decision of the four separating countries "is guided only by their unwillingness to welcome an Eastern European leader to the helm of the EJC."

Kantor succeeded French Pierre Besnainou in 2007 after being elected for a two-year term.

Richard Prasquier, head of CRIF, the umbrella representative body of French Jewish organizations, told EJP that the decision to suspend his EJC participation "had nothing to do with the fact the president is Russian." "The extension of the president's mandate for two more years without using the normal way was «unethical and illegal, that's all,» he said.

Kantor called next week's 'Global Forum on Anti-Semitism' to be held in Jerusalem "an ideal opportunity to engage in fruitful dialogue and find pragmatic solutions to these issues confronting our Jewish communities."

He said that in the wake of the upcoming commemoration of Israel's 60th anniversary "the European Jewish community should rally under the umbrella of the EJC and in so doing commit itself towards fostering the common destiny of the Jewish people in the diaspora and the state of Israel."

Stefan Kramer, secretary general of the German Jewish umbrella body, has said that he'd rather see the EJC's "success story continue" than build an alternative organization, as some other countries have reportedly proposed.

## **#17**

### **Jewish Gravesite believed found in E. Ukraine**

## **JTA Brief, February 22, 2008**

A grave believed to contain the remains of Jews was found in eastern Ukraine.

The grave was found in Dnepropetrovsk area, when workers digging for the foundation of a planned shopping center at the site of a former Jewish cemetery found bones.

Local authorities suspended the construction and assigned a special commission to investigate the case. The commission includes prominent representatives of the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community.

### **#18**

#### **Ukrainian minister vows to fight xenophobia**

**By Vladimir Matveyev**

**JTA Brief, February 17, 2008**

A new Ukrainian minister has vowed to stop xenophobia and interethnic hatred in his country.

Dr. Aleksandr Sagan, recently appointed head of the Ukrainian State Committee on Nationalities and Religions, told a news conference in Kiev on Feb. 14 that his ministry will fight xenophobia and interethnic hatred in Ukraine as well as implement mechanisms to prevent them.

Sagan plans to establish an interdepartmental council of experts, including scientists, political and other public figures, to counteract xenophobia, race discrimination and hatred. The council will coordinate the State Committee's activities to counteract conflict based on ethnic and religious grounds with other ministers and departments.

Sagan also spoke about the importance of intensifying relations with embassies, international organizations and foundations in order to protect the rights and cultures of ethnic minorities in Ukraine. He promised to do his utmost to protect the rights of ethnic minorities, especially Jews.

Last year, under the orders of President Victor Yushenko, the Ukrainian Secret Service set up a special unit for counteracting xenophobia and ethnic intolerance. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also established the post of ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary on counteraction of racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

### **#19**

#### **Jewish children's home opens in E. Ukraine**

**JTA Brief, February 18, 2008**

A new Jewish children's home and Jewish community Web site opened in an eastern Ukraine city.

Planet of Childhood, a new dormitory for Jewish children from impoverished families that can accommodate up to 12 children, and a Jewish community Web site - [www.krjew.com](http://www.krjew.com) - were opened in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kryvoy Rog.

The new dormitory includes a new residence hall, an extension to the local Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish day school, including bedrooms and a recreation room.

The dormitory was sponsored by Kryvoy Rog community leader Mikhail Marmer.

The Jewish community of Kryvoy Rog is an active member of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine.

### **#20**

#### **Kazakhstan's OSCE presidency to be unique: OSCE/ODIHR Director**

## **Kazinform, February 15, 2008**

Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Poland Alexei Volkov met with Director of the OSCE/ODIHR Christian Shtrokhal in Warsaw, Kazinform refers to the press service of the Kazakh Embassy to Poland. The sides discussed basic provisions of joint work in the sphere of human dimension for 2008, realization of the joint projects in terms of improvement of the national legislation and corresponding mechanisms in the light of the incoming presidency of Kazakhstan over the OSCE in 2010.

Alexei Volkov informed Christian Shtrokhal of the principal provisions of the Message of President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the nation as of February 6, 2008 "Growth of welfare of Kazakhstan's citizens is the primary goal of state policy". In particular, Kazakhstan's ambassador noted that priorities of Kazakhstan's development are: formation of socially oriented state, dynamic development of the economy, improvement of Kazakhstan's model of political and state structure on the basis of the long-term stability, peace and consent. Kazakhstan intends to strengthen its international positions and contribute to provision of regional stability and global security.

Director of the OSCE/ODIHR was informed of the fact that in connection with Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship in 2010, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev initiated a special program "A road to Europe", which will contribute to development of economic cooperation, attraction of technologies and management experience, improvement of legislation.

A lot of attention was paid to a forum of foreign affairs ministers of the Muslim and western countries "Common peace: towards progress through variety", which will be held in autumn 2008.

"Presidency of Kazakhstan over the OSCE in 2010 will become a unique one," Christian Shtrokhal said. According to him, Kazakhstan is able to make a considerable contribution to modernization of the organization.

In this context, Mr. Shtrokhal mentioned on readiness of his institute to realize the Kazakh national projects in the humanitarian sphere.

Upon completion of the talks, the parties agreed to develop constructive cooperation between Kazakhstan and OSCE/ODIHR, which will contribute to realization of the tasks, outlined in the President's Message.

### **#21**

#### **Kyrgyzstan: New Effort Aggressively Counters Hizb Ut-Tahrir, Religious Extremism**

**By Bruce Pannier**

**RFE/RL, February 15, 2008**

Prime Minister Viktor Chudinov on January 28 ordered into action a plan to combat the "spread of religious extremism" during the next three years. The only group identified by name was the "religious extremist party Hizb-ut Tahrir."

Hizb ut-Tahrir seeks to establish a caliphate in order to "resume the Islamic way of life," but rejects violence as a means to achieving that aim. It is banned throughout Central Asia.

Yet Kyrgyz authorities have never pursued the group with quite the same energy as their counterparts in neighboring Tajikistan, let alone as aggressively as the Uzbek government. Indeed, in some parts of Kyrgyzstan's section of the restive Ferghana Valley, there has seemed to be a tacit agreement between local authorities and Hizb ut-Tahrir members that if the religious group keeps a low profile, its followers can live and work untrammelled.

Now, that seems set to change.

Jolbors Jorobekov, former director of the Kyrgyz State Agency on Religious Affairs, tells RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that Hizb ut-Tahrir has succeeded in reaching far and wide across the country.

"Today, Hizb ut-Tahrir members are conducting their propaganda work in mountainous, remote regions -- the low standard of living of such regions is the reason for this," Jorobekov says. "It is all connected to financial conditions."

#### Ebb And Flow

Jorobekov says enlistment efforts rise and fall with the level of resources at members' disposal. "When they have money, they increase their recruitment activities -- they have the human and other resources -- brochures and leaflets, for example," Jorobekov says. "And when they don't have the finances, they again operate quietly, out of sight."

Russia's ITAR-TASS news agency reported on January 28 that "various Islamic religious groups from extremist sects" have been stepping up their activities in Kyrgyzstan. The news agency mentioned Hizb ut-Tahrir and reported that members who "earlier were only active in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions" are now increasingly working in the northern regions of the country and in the capital, Bishkek.

Kanat Murzakhilov, the deputy director of the State Agency on Religious Affairs, tells RFE/RL that because of the spread of Hizb ut-Tahrir and other groups, it is important to work throughout the country to counter their influence. The Kyrgyz government's decision should serve as a "warning," he says.

Hizb ut-Tahrir "activists carry on their propaganda activities underground, but they are as active now as they ever were," Murzakhilov says. "The members of our agency -- together with the Spiritual Board of Muslims -- are working to explain [the dangers] to the people."

He adds that Kyrgyz authorities are also "engaged in various preventative measures" concerning Hizb ut-Tahrir, which describes itself as "a political party whose ideology is Islam."

#### Broad Reach

Hizb ut-Tahrir's influence reaches far beyond northern Kyrgyzstan. The group is not outlawed in Britain, and it is bolstered globally by an Internet presence that includes chat rooms and other informal channels to engage the disaffected.

Members have been arrested in major industrial cities in northern Kazakhstan and Russian Siberia.

Hizb ut-Tahrir preaches the overthrow of secular governments and establishment of an Islamic state based on Shari'a law. Just how far this Islamic state extends depends on which member is speaking. Some consider the Fergana Valley, also shared by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, to be sufficient. Others claim to want all of Central Asia -- or all the traditionally Islamic lands.

Its website describes its mission as "establishing an Islamic state that executes the systems of Islam and carries its call to the world." Hizb ut-Tahrir denounces the use of violence.

Governments in Central Asia have made numerous attempts to link the group to violent acts, although there has never been any conclusive evidence to prove such a link. Reports of arrests of members mention literature, audiotapes, and sometimes computer discs as being confiscated. A few cartridges of ammunition have also been found.

But signs of an expanding membership concerns the governments in the region. The ITAR-TASS report cited "official information" that said there were some 2,000 Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Kyrgyzstan, but added that "experts in the security field" say they number many times higher.

## Defiant Membership

Chudinov's statement did not shed any light on Kyrgyzstan's planned tactics in its campaign against religious extremism. It only said that "ministries, state committees, administrative departments, and other organs of the executive branch, local government administrations, and authorities" would participate.

RFE/RL spoke with a defiant Hizb ut-Tahrir member who accused the Kyrgyz government of attacking Islam, saying that no new campaign against his group would eliminate it or prevent its activities.

"This action against the activities of the Hizb ut-Tahrir party will not have any effect," the member said. "It will not be curtailed or stopped. We will continue to do our task in accordance with our program -- that is to say, we will carry on our political and ideological struggle."

The dedication and intensity of that struggle remains to be seen, as there are officials in the Kyrgyz government who in the past have called for legalizing and registering Hizb ut-Tahrir. Those officials, including Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir-uulu, are likely to keep a close watch on the campaign against Islamic extremists to guard against rights violations.

Meanwhile, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will be pressing Kyrgyz authorities to round up as many Hizb ut-Tahrir members as possible and prevent the group from strengthening its foothold anywhere in the region, including Kyrgyzstan.

## #22

### **AZERBAIJAN: WASHINGTON, BAKU CONCERNED ABOUT PKK CELLS IN CAUCASUS**

**Ron Synovitz**

**EurasiaNet Partner Post from RFE/RL, February 16, 2008**

Azerbaijan's government has raised concerns with US officials that militants from Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) are expanding from northern Iraq into the Caucasus and could be setting up cells in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov tells RFE/RL that the PKK issue was the main focus of his talks on February 14 with visiting US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State on Terrorism Frank Urbanchik.

"We suggested that this issue be watched closely," he says. "These issues will be more broadly discussed, I believe, in the next round of talks between Azerbaijan and the United States."

Like Turkish officials, Azimov describes the PKK as a "terrorist group." But Azimov stops short of confirming Turkish state media reports that allege the PKK has already moved from northern Iraq into the Azerbaijani districts of Fuzuli and Lachin. Both of those districts have been occupied since the early 1990s by ethnic-Armenian forces who waged a separatist war in Azerbaijan's breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

But Azimov does suggest that PKK fighters are moving closer to Azerbaijani territory. "Lately, we have been watching [PKK] activities...very closely," he says. "Due to the problems that Turkey is facing, we have been very vigilant. According to the information we are receiving from different sources, the activities of this organization are approaching our country."

More specifically, Azimov says the PKK is building "close relations" with "terrorist groups and organizations" that are enemies of both Turkey and Azerbaijan -- a remark seen in Baku as a reference to Armenia or ethnic-Armenian forces.

Government officials in Yerevan have consistently denied Turkish media reports that PKK militants have moved into the districts of Azerbaijan that are occupied by ethnic Armenians.

Independent and opposition media in Azerbaijan also report that PKK militants are now active in parts of Azerbaijan. Those reports alleged that ethnic-Kurdish officials in Azerbaijan's government have been backing the PKK -- a claim that Baku also denies.

## US Regional Concerns

Jonathan Henik, a public-affairs officer at the US Embassy in Baku, confirms that the United States and Azerbaijan have been discussing the threat of PKK militancy. He says most of Washington's previous discussions on the issue had been with Turkey or with European governments.

But Henik says the United States is increasingly concerned about what appears to be growing ties between the PKK and other groups in the Caucasus that have been deemed terrorist organizations. He says Washington is also worried about the threat the PKK poses to energy infrastructure in the Caucasus.

Those concerns focus on a 1,770-kilometer pipeline that carries Caspian oil from Baku through Georgia and on to southeastern Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.

About 20 million ethnic Kurds are scattered mainly in northern Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. Describing themselves as the world's largest stateless minority, most live in southeastern Turkey, where the PKK has fought an insurgency since 1984. More than 30,000 people have been killed in that fighting, most of them ethnic Kurds.

Though the PKK declared a cease-fire in 1999, fighting by separatists resumed in southeastern Turkey in 2004. Authorities in Ankara fear that the Kurds in northern Iraq plan to set up their own state -- a move that would stir tensions and lead to increased calls for autonomy by Turkish Kurds.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul raised the issue during talks at the White House in early January with U.S. President George W. Bush. After that meeting, Bush told reporters he supported Turkey's efforts to fight the PKK militants in northern Iraq.

"Relations between the United States and Turkey are important for our country. And we have worked hard to make them strong," Bush said. "And I believe they are strong. We deal with common problems. One such problem is our continuing fight against a common enemy -- and that's terrorists. And such a common enemy is the PKK. It's an enemy to Turkey. It's an enemy to Iraq. And it's an enemy to people who want to live in peace."

## #23

### **Over 20,000 Rally Against Saakashvili The Associated Press, February 18, 2008**

More than 20,000 opposition supporters rallied in Georgia's capital on Friday, trying to increase pressure on President Mikheil Saakashvili before parliamentary elections expected in May.

The demonstrators gathered in Tbilisi in front of the parliament building. They held a minute of silence in memory of one of the most influential opposition leaders, billionaire businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili, who died in his home near London on Tuesday -- of heart disease, according to pathologists' initial conclusions.

"He is a victim of persecution by Georgia's current government," Koba Davitashvili, the leader of the opposition People's Party, told the crowd.

The opposition groups are demanding a recount of the Jan. 5 presidential election, in which Saakashvili won a second term with 53 percent of the votes, according to the official results. They are also asking for fair access to state television and dismissal of the interior minister.

In January, they gave Saakashvili a deadline to meet their demands, which also included changes in the current election system so it becomes more transparent. The deadline expired Friday.

"We are here! We must show that we will not give up," said Levan Gachechiladze, who challenged Saakashvili in the Jan. 5 election.

The opposition claims that Saakashvili was pushed over the 50 percent threshold for an outright victory by fraud, and wants him to face a runoff against Gachechiladze, who officially won about 25 percent.

Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe called the vote a "triumphant step" for democracy in Georgia, but pointed to an array of violations.

Saakashvili's government has been accused of authoritarianism and criticized for failing to ease poverty.

A brutal police crackdown Nov. 7 on an opposition rally in Tbilisi caused public anger and drew criticism from Western governments. Saakashvili called the early presidential vote to ease tensions.

## **#24**

### **U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairmen Visit RFE/RL, Call for Kosovo Recognition RFE/RL, February 19, 2008**

Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-Florida), Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and Co-Chairman Senator Ben Cardin (D-Maryland) today said recognition of Kosovo's declaration of independence on Sunday will bring to successful conclusion a difficult chapter in the break-up of former Yugoslavia. Both U.S. legislators said they hope to persuade other members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to follow U.S. leadership in recognizing Kosovo.

Cardin and Hastings made the statement at a press conference at the headquarters of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Prague, during a two-day visit to the Czech capital to discuss human rights issues with Czech government officials.

Senator Cardin said he expected the Czech government to extend recognition shortly, adding "that is the right policy" and that Kosovars have been waiting very patiently for many years for independence.

Asked whether this will encourage aspirations to statehood of other minorities, Cardin and Hastings emphasized the role of the United Nations and the international community in implementing a planned and deliberate process for Kosovo's independence. They said this is the model for achieving independence, not unilateral actions by individual groups.

During a two-hour visit at RFE/RL, Cardin and Hastings also met with RFE/RL broadcasters and analysts for a briefing on media freedom and human rights violations in RFE/RL's broadcast region.

Chairman Hastings is leading a CSCE delegation to Vienna to participate in the winter session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

## **#25**

### **Kosovo's independence comes amid uncertainty By Dinah Spritzer JTA, February 17, 2008**

On a forlorn road dotted with half-built houses, Ines Quono reflects on her struggle in a land so remote to most Americans it might as well be Oz.

But instead of a yellow brick road, there is crumbling, mud-drenched pavement piled high with garbage.

"The only thing that works in Kosovo is the banks; we all have to borrow money to do something -- anything," says Quono, 28.

Quono is among the last Jews of Kosovo, a southern province of Serbia about half the size of New Jersey that declared independence Sunday.

Unemployment in Kosovo hovers at 50 percent and the average wage is \$350 a month. "We all worry how we will get by," says Quono, a university student, wife and mother of a toddler.

The future of Quono and her family is uncertain, as they decide whether their destiny is in Israel or in southeastern Europe, where their roots go back to the 15th-century Spanish Inquisition, when thousands of Sephardic Jews fled to the Balkans.

There are some 50 Jews left in Kosovo. Belonging to three families, or clans, they all live in the city of Prizren, a rare gem of ancient architecture amid a landscape devastated by war, poverty and Communist-era concrete.

The United Nations took over the administration of Kosovo in 1999 after a brutal conflict between Kosovo Albanians seeking independence and Serbian troops controlled by strongman Slobodan Milosevic.

Ethnic Albanians account for 90 percent of Kosovo's population of 2.2 million. The Albanians are Muslim, but largely secular.

Corruption, criminality and a lack of foreign investment have marked life in Kosovo over the last nine years, during which final-status negotiations between a now democratic Serbia and Kosovo's ethnic Albanian leaders failed.

On Sunday, Kosovo's prime minister declared independence with support from the United States and most of the European Union -- and with fierce opposition from Serbia, whose position is backed by Russia.

Distressed by a war they watched from the sidelines and facing an uncertain future, the Jews of Prizren are gloomy. When the war started, the other Jews in Kosovo -- the 50 living in the capital city of Pristina -- fled to Serbia, where they spoke the language and felt a part of the culture. But those in Prizren, where Jews speak Albanian and Turkish -- there is a large Turkish population there -- stayed.

Now, with Kosovo having broken away from Serbia, those like Votim Demiri, Quono's father, who made a decent living under communism, find it hard to leave the homes they built, despite fears of growing tensions with their neighbors.

"There was not anti-Semitism in the past, but with the Saudi charities here now we are seeing a Wahabi influence for the first time," Demiri said, referring to the fundamentalist Islamic ideology Saudi Arabian clerics have tried to export, with little success, in the Balkans. "I think the newspapers these days are not portraying Jews in such a positive light."

The greatest concern for Jews here, however, is the concern shared by all Kosovars: feeding their families. In this regard, they are both at an advantage and a disadvantage.

They are helped by the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee, which provides them with social services, hosts celebrations on Jewish holidays and tries to help with employment.

On the negative side, Jews are outsiders in quasi-state controlled by ethnic Albanians who mete out the few jobs there are to friends and family, said Robert Djerassi, the JDC official responsible for the organization's activities in Kosovo.

"Ninety percent of Jews in Prizren are jobless," he said.

Earlier this month, the JDC held a brainstorming session on job opportunities with 25 Prizren Jews aged 40 and under.

"I said, 'If you can think of a shop or service, like giving English lessons, I find some capital to get you started,'" Djerassi told JTA.

"They tried to explain to me why it cannot happen; they are very pessimistic."

There are also obstacles in connecting Prizren's Jews to other Jews in the region.

"My idea is to make them part of something bigger, to bring them to events in Skopje or Belgrade. But the small children, 15 and under, they don't speak Serbian and that's a problem," Djerassi said.

"Our spiritual life, like our economic life, is a disaster," Demiri said, pointing to his rotting roof. His children, it seems, are preparing for an eventual move to Israel.

Quono's sister, Teuta Demiri, 22, recently spent a year at a kibbutz, where she studied Hebrew. A bank teller in Prizren, Teuta is thinking about aliyah but is not confident she can find work in Israel. Her brother is studying Hebrew and also is nervous about his job prospects.

"I have been thinking for eight years whether to go or not to go to Israel," their father, Votim Demiri said.

He shows off a 20-year-old picture of his mother talking to Simon Peres in Ashdod, Israel, where she moved after World War II while her children opted to build a socialist state in the heart of Europe. But they always knew about their Jewish roots.

Religion, however, was far from their lives.

Demiri is from a generation of Jews who fondly recall life in Yugoslavia, of which Kosovo was a part.

A former textile factory director, Demiri has been mostly out of work for the last two decades, and his prospects of employment are dim. What he does have is a beautiful, 19th-century, three-story home, albeit one he cannot afford to maintain.

For some of Prizren's Jews, aliyah is complicated by more than employment worries.

Ulvi Zhalta, 59, looks decades older than his cousin Demiri, 62, due to such health problems as heart disease and an eye clouded by blindness.

Like nearly all Jews who stayed in Prizren after World War II, Zhalta's mother married a non-Jew, in her case an ethnic Albanian.

"She was buried in a Muslim cemetery. There are no Jewish cemeteries here, but she was registered as a member of the Jewish community in Belgrade," he said.

Zhalta said he applied for permission to immigrate to Israel in 2000, but has not yet received permission from the Jewish Agency for Israel. He suspects his mother's Jewish identity is the source of the delay.

In response to queries on Zhalta's case, an Israeli representative of the Jewish Agency said the details of individual applications are private.

"Everyone in my family wants to go to Israel," Zhalta said as the lights went off in his cousin's living room during one of the daily power outages that have gone on for so long in Kosovo that few can remember life without them.

**#26**

**For Leviev, All That Glitters Isn't Gold**

**Protests in front of new diamond store here latest in string of bad news for billionaire.**

**by Walter Ruby**

**The Jewish Week, February 20, 2008**

Perhaps he should have stayed behind the scenes.

Ever since billionaire diamond and real estate magnate Lev Leviev began to raise his profile and personalize his brand with the opening of deluxe diamond shops in London in 2006 and here in 2007, the 51-year-old Uzbekistan-born tycoon has run into a sustained string of bad news and adverse publicity. Even a hagiographic profile in The New York Times Magazine last September — in which he revealed a secret desire to become prime minister of Israel within 10 years — seems not to have helped.

Among the raspberries aimed Leviev's way in recent months:

- A much-reported snub by President Vladimir Putin of the Leviev-supported Chabadnik chief rabbi of Russia.
- Unflattering stories in the Israeli media about Leviev's decision to move his base of operations from Tel Aviv to London.
- The unprecedented step taken Monday by the Israel Securities Authority of banning Leviev's main firm, Africa-Israel Investments Ltd., from offering any securities to the public until April 15. The Authority took the step following comments by Leviev at a diamond convention last week that Africa-Israel "is the best bargain on the market," which caused the company's shares on the Tel Aviv Stock Market to soar 10 percent in two days.
- And ongoing demonstrations outside his diamond shop here in protest of the building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank by Leviev-owned construction companies.

So far, the adverse news reports have had little impact on the financial bottom line of Leviev's far-flung financial empire. Leviev's personal fortune was estimated by Forbes Magazine last March at \$4.1 billion, and soared significantly higher later in 2007 after AFI Development, the Russian property unit of Africa-Israel, raised \$1.4 billion in the biggest IPO (initial public offering) ever by a European real estate developer.

Nevertheless, the negative press has certainly pricked the aura of globe-straddling invincibility Leviev had carefully built up over the past 20 years. That aura began to be formed with his legendary 1989 meeting with the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who blessed his decision to do business in Russia, asking only "Don't forget to help the Jews."

It continued as the penniless immigrant from Uzbekistan eventually managed to crack the decades-old diamond monopoly by the South Africa-based De Beers Group and, with the addition of diamond mines in the African nation of Angola, become the world's largest cutter and polisher of diamonds and more recently, a major retailer as well.

The recent Putin snub dealt a blow to Chabad's dominance in Russia (though the billionaire gives the outreach group some \$30 million a year) and could impact Leviev in a country where closeness to power regularly trumps the rule of law. And the Israeli media's speculation that the billionaire moved to London to avoid paying Israeli income taxes on the \$1.4 billion raised on the London stock market in the 2007 IPO deal has certainly tarnished his reputation among many Israelis as a patriotic, devout man. Leviev said the

move — from a modest home in B'nei Brak to a \$70 million residence in London's glitzy Hampstead district — was based on wanting to be closer to the center of his worldwide business operations.

But the persistent weekly protests outside his sumptuous Leviev diamond store on Madison Avenue have been the most visible sign of his run of bad luck.

They began last November at the lavish reception marking the store's opening. "A-list" actresses Susan Sarandon and Isabella Rossellini graced the event, as did heiress Denise Rich. But the opening became something of a PR nightmare when a pro-Palestinian group called Adalah set up pickets outside the store.

The demonstrations have continued regularly, and they have garnered widespread mention not only in the tabloid press but also in diamond industry trade publications. They are focused on the work of two Leviev-owned construction companies in the building of new Jewish settlements of Matityahu East and Zufim on agricultural land that, according to Adalah, belonged for generations to the residents of two Palestinian villages, Bil'in and Jayyous.

Adalah also trumpets charges by the Business and Human Rights Resource Group, an international NGO, that security firms used by Leviev to guard his diamond-mining operations in Angola have committed "systematic violations of human rights ... including the use of torture" against Angolan diamond miners; and condemned alleged "abusive real estate development schemes" in New York by Leviev and former partner Shaya Boymelgreen.

Adalah cites complaints from groups like the Laborer's International Union and ACORN that Leviev and Boymelgreen "employed underpaid non-union workers in hazardous conditions and violated housing codes to construct luxury apartments that displace low-income and moderate-income residents in Brooklyn."

Leviev has invested \$1 billion in real estate in New York City over the last year, including cherished Manhattan landmarks like the old New York Times building.

Leviev, who declined a request for an interview, has limited his response to a brief statement that says the varied charges against him are "politically motivated" and "deliberately neglect" his "extensive humanitarian and philanthropic work."

Adalah's New York chapter, which seems to be composed about equally of Arabs and Jews, and which works in tandem with groups like Jews Against the Occupation, has chosen a creative, if often heavy-handed, "guerilla theater" approach to transmitting its anti-Leviev message.

During a recent pre-Valentine's Day gathering outside Leviev's Manhattan diamond store, the approximately 40 demonstrators carried placards with slogans like "Have a Heart, Leviev" and "Leviev Breaks Palestinian Hearts."

Facing the shop's front window, which was emblazoned with the slogan urging passersby to "Celebrate Love with Leviev," several of the protestors belted out a mocking version of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend," which included such lyrics as: "Lev grows bold, With billions sold, And Palestine starves while you spend ... Lev's diamonds are a crime's best friend."

According to El-Kadi, an IT professional, "We are trying to copy the strategy of the residents of Bil'in who have been holding nonviolent demonstrations for three years protesting the seizure of their land for settlement-building. Leviev is targeting the villagers of Bil'in and Jayyous, and we are committed to targeting him in return."

Ethan Heitner, a leader of Adalah whose parents are Israelis, said, "We are pleased with the energy of these demonstrations and believe we have found a creative way to deliver our message. We plan to keep these demonstrations going on a regular basis until Leviev stops building settlements and abusing human rights."

Asked whether the group's skits do not trade in anti-Semitic imagery, with their focus on greedy diamond merchants and real estate magnates, Heitner replied: "No, we are careful not to do that. Don't forget that half the people in Adalah are Jewish. Still, when dealing with someone like Leviev, it is difficult not to trigger those concerns, because he is, after all, a diamond merchant."

Pedestrians passing by the Leviev store seemed split on the demonstration.

David Sonnenberg, an Upper East Side resident whose Israeli wife Shoshanna demonstratively tore up a leaflet as the couple passed by the Leviev store, remarked, "This is outrageous. Hamas tries to destroy Israel and sends missiles crashing into Sderot, but these people only blame Israel. Lev Leviev has done many good things, including helping Jews in Russia."

Yet Dogan Karandiz, a visiting industrialist from Turkey, remarked, "It is nice to see people protesting in a peaceful manner, which is not always the case in Turkey. We in Turkey have close ties to both Israelis and Palestinians, but I do feel for the Palestinians as underdogs."

Kristina Newman, a sales associate at Domenico Vacco, a high-end clothing store located alongside the Leviev store, was less charitable to the demonstrators. "I find it incredibly annoying that they keep on holding these protests. They rant on about blood diamonds, but I guess they are just [upset] that they can't afford a Leviev diamond themselves."