



UCSJ: Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

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CHRONICLE OF ANTISEMITISM IN RUSSIA: 2002-2004¹

(December 2004)

Abstract

The majority of antisemitic hate crimes reported in recent years in Russia remain unsolved, and despite increasingly positive rhetoric, and better police practices in some cities (most notably in Moscow), the authorities have never truly gotten serious about tackling the problems of antisemitism and racism. The geographic scope of the problem is also a cause for concern—antisemitic attacks and incidents of illegal antisemitic hate speech have taken place even in parts of the country where the Jewish community is small. Police officials and prosecutors routinely classify ethnically and religiously motivated violence as ordinary assaults and murders, lending credibility to human rights groups' charges that deliberate obfuscation by law enforcement agencies of the issue of hate crimes against Jews and some other minorities is taking place on a massive scale. Knowing this, and given the police's reputation for brutality, many victims of hate crimes choose not to report them, skewing the statistics even more.

Provincial authorities have in the recent past collaborated with violent neo-Nazi groups, and President Putin has at times contradicted his pro-Jewish rhetoric by promoting openly antisemitic parties, most explicitly during the December 2003 parliamentary elections, when government-controlled television swamped the airwaves with positive coverage of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's extremist nationalist party the LDPR and the extremist nationalist Motherland (*Rodina*) bloc. Both of these parties did very well in the December elections, bringing to power the most radically nationalistic State Duma in the country's post-Soviet history.

These threats to the Jewish and other minority communities are accentuated by growing authoritarianism. Since President Putin's inauguration, all national television stations have been placed under state control, one of the country's leading private companies (Yukos) is about to be de facto expropriated, gubernatorial elections have been abolished, and former KGB officials have been appointed to influential posts throughout the bureaucracy.

Introduction

Problems that emerged in the 1990's continue to endanger the safety of Jews throughout Russia, most notably the lack of adequate protection from antisemitic hate crimes by often corrupt and largely indifferent law enforcement agencies and courts, apparently deliberate attempts by law enforcement agencies to minimize the problem by classifying hate crimes as "normal" assaults or murders, alliances between some provincial authorities and antisemitic organizations, and the

¹ This report was written by UCSJ's Research and Advocacy Director, Nickolai Butkevich.

illegal, yet generally unpunished, incitement of hatred against Jews by media controlled by some provincial governments and by dozens of non-governmental publishers.

President Putin has made several important and praiseworthy statements condemning antisemitism and has made numerous public appearances with rabbis from one stream of the bitterly factionalized Russian Jewish community whom he has helped to promote to leadership positions. President Putin's sponsorship of Chief Rabbi Beryl Lazar (one of two chief rabbis in Russia) during intra-communal power struggles in the late 1990s, combined with the perceived need by some minority religious leaders to publicly minimize the problems that their communities face in order to avoid offending the government, go a long way towards explaining the numerous optimistic declarations made by Rabbi Lazar and some other Russian Jewish leaders that antisemitism barely exists in Russia, and that the Russian government is firmly committed to fighting it.

Some of these now marginalized Russian Jewish leaders have very different views of the situation than Rabbi Lazar. On March 14, 2003 the country's leading newspaper *Izvestiya* published an interview with chief rabbi Adolf Shaevich. In response to a question about the current state of antisemitism in Russia, Rabbi Shaevich said the following: "Once again, unfortunately, antisemitism exists, especially street-level antisemitism. With the collapse of the USSR, many openly fascist parties sprang up and antisemitic publications began to be published, which continue to exist to the present day. We hear constantly from all corners of Russia about attacks on synagogues and desecrations of Jewish cemeteries, we are constantly shown publications, newspapers and books with openly antisemitic content and calls to exterminate Jews. But we do not get any support whatsoever from law enforcement agencies [emphasis added]."

On February 18, 2004 the Russian Jewish Congress—a leading secular Jewish group—issued a statement accusing the government of covering up hate crimes and even collaborating with hate groups. The statement, the English language version of which was entitled "Let's Call a Spade a Spade: Fascism is Fascism!", read, in part:

As the presidential elections are coming closer the intolerance is growing... The streets of Russian cities are equally dangerous for everybody who has a pronounced non-Slavic appearance... [T]he Law Authorities are either incapable of controlling the situation or are not willing to react. Police officials who investigate criminal cases of Russian Nazis, get secret instructions to avoid the "nationalized – oriented" versions of killings and not to use the word "skinhead"... Those who are responsible for nationalistic-oriented murders and massacres must be punished as "nationalists", but not as "usual hooligans." Open activities of fascist groups that number thousands and tens of thousands of supporters would be not possible without the Authorities' support of the ideology of intolerance [my emphasis]... The Russian authorities must show the political will to struggle against the upcoming fascism. If we don't struggle against the multi-ethnic dissension it can grow into a multi-ethnic massacre. All the voters, all the peoples and confessions of Russia have [the] right to count on equal security rights.

The Russian Jewish Congress appeals to the State Authorities to remove those who support and help the Neo-Nazis from the State Law Authorities and stop the development of fascism in Russia. [Russian Jewish Congress web site: <http://ww.rjc.ru/site/site.aspx?SECTIONID=157971&IID=210374>]

At the time of writing, the Russian Jewish Congress has elected a new leader who is widely perceived as very close to the Kremlin. It remains to be seen if this change at the top will lead the Congress to tone down its criticism of the government's general passivity against antisemitic and racist violence.

President Putin strives to achieve a balance between showing a positive face to the West by publicly standing with Jewish leaders, and currying favor, when it appears politically expedient, with antisemitic forces, most notably by supporting the LDPR and Motherland during the 2003 parliamentary elections. In recent years, he has met with and awarded medals to prominent antisemites, and while he condemns antisemitism and has never shown any personal antisemitic bias, President Putin has not once publicly condemned an antisemitic official, party, or politician by name.

Nor do the President's own professed pro-Jewish sentiments seem to have filtered down very well to lower level officials, including police, prosecutors and judges. Most hate crimes remain unsolved, including assaults, bombings of synagogues, arsons against Jewish sites and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries.

The skinhead movement is growing at an explosive pace. According to the US State Department's 2003 human rights report on Russia: "Skinhead groups, which began in the country in the early 1990's, numbered 50,000 in over 50 organizations at year's end, according to the Ministry of the Interior." Skinheads now exist in most Russian cities and in certain regions, even in small towns. Over ten extremist nationalist organizations with around 15,000 members operate in Moscow alone, according to city police officials participating in a roundtable entitled "Youth and the Problems of Political and National Extremism" held on June 22, 2001 in Moscow.

Legal Tools Against Hate Crimes Ignored or Misused

According to the US State Department's 2003 human rights report on Russia:

Despite appeals for tolerance during the year by the President and other senior officials, who recalled the multiethnic nature of the country (the population includes more than 100 national groups), violence and societal prejudice against ethnic and national minorities, as well as against foreigners, persisted... Attacks generally appeared to be random, and were carried out by private individuals or small groups inspired by racial hatred. Law enforcement authorities knew the identity of some of the attackers based on their racial intolerance or criminal records. For example, during the year, members of ethnic or racial minorities were the victims of beatings, extortion, and harassment by skinheads and members of other racist and extremist groups. Police made few arrests, although many such cases were reported by human rights organizations. [My emphasis] Many victims, particularly migrants and asylum seekers who lacked residence documents recognized by the police, chose not to report such attacks or to report indifference on the part of police.

President Putin's public gestures towards the Jewish community have helped, to some degree, to lessen antisemitic sentiment, though by exactly how much is impossible to measure, since Russian officials do not collect hate crimes statistics. Instead, the police and other law enforcement officials tend to classify what in the US would be termed hate crimes (synagogue arsons, cemetery desecrations, beatings of ethnic minorities by people yelling antisemitic or racist slogans) as "hooliganism" or other euphemistic terms purposely employed to obfuscate the issue of anti-minority violence.

The Criminal Code does have an article (282) which prohibits hate speech ("the incitement of ethnic or religious discord"). This article is occasionally applied, in combination with "hooliganism" or murder charges, to what would qualify as a hate crime in the US, but its use is rare. A February 27, 2004 RIA-Novosti report quoted Nationalities Minister Vladimir Zorin as saying that ten Article 282 cases are currently before the courts, whereas in all of 2002, only one such case was tried (the defendants ended up acquitted). According to the minister, this shows

that Russia is “now doing more to combat” xenophobia and extremism. However, holding only ten such trials in a country the size of Russia, where hate crimes regularly take place, shows a very disturbing level of government complacency.

Because Article 282 was designed to prosecute hate speech or hate symbols like swastikas, its use in conjunction with hooliganism or murder charges is often found by Russian judges to be legally inappropriate, which helps to explain why most Article 282 cases fall apart or are never brought in the first place. However, the Criminal Code does have provisions within articles covering assault (Article 111) and murder (Article 105) that envision punishment for assaults or murders motivated by ethnic hatred. To the best of my knowledge, until March 2004, these legal provisions have been applied only four times in Russia’s entire post-Soviet history, twice these charges were dropped, and only twice did they result in a conviction. The most recent example came in March 2004, when prosecutors in a Voronezh murder case brought Article 105 hate crimes charges against three skinheads charged with stabbing an African student to death. After initially denying that the killing of an African student there was a racist crime, prosecutors reclassified the case under the section of Article 105 that deals with murders motivated by ethnic hatred, and actually achieved a conviction. While this is laudable progress, the important point is that Russian prosecutors have consistently refused to apply the most effective legal tools they have at their disposal to combat hate crimes. In my opinion, this shows a dangerous indifference to the issue of ethnically and religiously motivated crime; an indifference that puts Jews and other minority groups in peril.

The 2003 Parliamentary Elections

Two extremist nationalist parties allied with the Kremlin did extremely well in Russia's parliamentary elections on December 7, 2003, bringing to power the most radically nationalistic State Duma in the country’s post-Soviet history. The two pro-Western liberal political parties represented in the previous Duma—Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS)—were eliminated, removing from the Duma the only political forces consistently dedicated to the promotion of inter-ethnic tolerance and democracy. Their place was taken by two extremist nationalist parties: Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), which almost doubled the number of its seats with 11% of the vote, and the Motherland bloc, which won 9%. To no one’s surprise, the pro-Kremlin United Russia party got the lion share of the vote—37%. Both United Russia and the extremist nationalists benefited from overwhelmingly positive coverage on government-controlled television, which thanks to the Putin administration’s elimination of the independent television media, is the only game in town. The role of opposition now falls exclusively to the newly-diminished Communists, who only won 13% of the vote. It should be noted that when the votes of all three blatantly antisemitic non-Kremlin parties (the Communists, the LDPR, Motherland) are added up, they come to 33% of the total vote, almost as many as the 37% who voted for United Russia (the rest voted for parties that did not cross the 5% barrier mandated for party representation in the State Duma). In other words, one out of three Russian voters supported explicitly antisemitic parties in the December 2003 elections.

The alarming prediction by SPS leader Boris Nemtsov that “the new Duma will consist mostly of bureaucrats and national-socialists” basically came true. While Russia’s Jews don’t regret the weakening of the Communists, whose leaders fell to a new low in their Jew-baiting rhetoric during the 2003 election cycle, the LDPR’s and Motherland’s Kremlin connections make them much more dangerous, since it’s better to have antisemites and racists in opposition to the

government than serving as the Kremlin's allies. President Putin's positive rhetorical gestures towards the Jewish community pale in significance to his very real political support for the hard-core antisemites and racists in the LDRP and Motherland. [See UCSJ's report "In Their Own Words: Extremist Nationalists in the New Duma."]²

The Communists, the only remaining opposition force in the Duma, also heavily relied on antisemitic propaganda this election cycle. In a September 2003 interview, Communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov warned that Russia is threatened by "Zionization," which he blamed for the "the mass impoverishment and extinction" of millions of Russians since the collapse of the USSR. A November 2003 paid political ad quoted the number two man on the Communist party list, Senator Nikolai Kondratenko, accusing "Zionist capital" of "sucking all the living juice out of Russia and Russians" and of planning to "kill through hunger, cold, and moral torture no less than 70 million more people" in Russia. Both men won election to the Duma, where they will be joined by their comrade General Albert Makashov, who back in 1998 earned international notoriety for publicly calling for the mass murder of Russian Jews. After being stricken from the voting rolls right before the 1999 Duma elections, General Makashov won his old seat back in 2003, a clear sign that for many Russian voters, militant antisemitism is seen as a positive attribute in a candidate.

A month before the election, the Kremlin's ally Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (head of the LDPR, which doubled its seats in the December election) issued a statement in support of Malaysia's then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, who had earlier garnered international condemnation by claiming that "Jews rule the world." "He told the truth!" Mr. Zhirinovskiy raved. "The biggest banks and world corporations are also ruled by Jews." In the wake of the terrorist bombing on a suburban train in southern Russia in early December, Mr. Zhirinovskiy was quoted as saying that the Chechens were obviously guilty of the atrocity, and once their identities are established, all residents of their home villages should be exterminated. This kind of genocidal language is typical of nationalist politicians like Mr. Zhirinovskiy, who typically hate Jews just as fiercely as they despise Chechens and other Muslim minority groups.

Like the LDPR, Motherland has a large contingent of politicians known for their antisemitic and anti-American rhetoric, and one of its founding parties (People's Will) counts many of the country's most infamous neo-Nazis as its members. Two producers of the antisemitic, Holocaust denying television show "Russian House" won seats running with Motherland, as did Andrey Savelev, who during an election debate in 2003 baited Vladimir Zhirinovskiy into a fistfight on national television by accusing him of being a secret Jew. Another new deputy—former Defense Minister Igor Rodionov—wrote an article shortly before the election calling for "Zionists" to "repent for their crimes against the Russian people." Another—Oleg Mashchenko—called Zionism "the main enemy of the peoples of Russia" in an interview with a hometown newspaper, while yet another Motherland deputy—Natalya Narochnitskaya—accused Israel of purposely inciting Palestinian terrorism for its own nefarious ends and strongly hinted that Israel was behind the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US.

Russia-watchers have pointed out that the election results give President Putin a super-majority in the Duma, raising the possibility that he will revise the Constitution and prolong his term in office. Authoritarian tendencies, evidenced most recently by the government's campaign against the mostly Jewish "oligarchs" and increased censorship, are now expected to strengthen

² Available on the Internet at: <http://www.fsmonitor.com/stories/011204DumaElections2003.shtml>

considerably. The potential creation of a new kind of dictatorship in Russia, based on a partially-controlled market economy a la the Chinese model coupled with extreme nationalism, poses obvious long-term dangers to the Jewish community.

UCSJ's January 2004 report "In Their Own Words: Extremist Nationalists in the New Duma" contains extensive quotes from many of the elected State Duma members demonstrating their deep hatred of Jews, the West, and some other minority groups.³

The General Lack of Serious Police Reaction to Antisemitic Incidents

Antisemitic acts of violence are rarely punished in cities throughout Russia. Police routinely fail to arrest antisemitic extremists, even though in some cases the culprits are known to them. Even when such extremists are brought before a judge, in many cases their trials degenerate into farces. This is especially true of cases brought under a law banning the public incitement of ethnic or religious hatred (Article 282 of the Criminal Code). In the rare occasions when such cases make it to trial, the judicial process is often characterized by endless studies by court-appointed "expert" committees charged with determining whether or not the word "kike" or symbols like the swastika incite ethnic hatred. Incredibly, some courts have ruled that they do not. This leniency towards hate crimes is in sharp contradiction to the normal practice of Russian criminal law, which tends to severely punish even first-time perpetrators of minor crimes. Given this long-standing and widespread pattern, Russian Jews are unlikely to receive proper protection from police or the courts if they are targeted for violence by hate groups.

Blatantly illegal antisemitic events that would have to be held secretly in most parts of the world often take place openly in Moscow. For example, a "poetry reading" organized by neo-Nazi groups at Moscow's world-renowned Mayakovsky Museum on January 20, 2002 celebrated the memory of Adolf Hitler by playing video footage of Jews being executed and tortured by Nazis. The event was organized by the People's National Party, a radical skinhead group which distributed its rabidly antisemitic newspaper *Ya Russky!* ("I am Russian!") to visitors. Videotapes of Nazi party rallies, Hitler's speeches, and Holocaust footage of Jews being tortured and killed were also on sale. Before the poetry reading began, visitors were able to watch Holocaust footage and skinhead marches accompanied by background music projected onto a screen in an expensive, high-tech laser light display. The poetry reading consisted mostly of slogans praising Hitler and the September 11 terrorist attacks while the audience responded with shouts of "Beat the kikes!" and "Sieg Heil!" Ruslan Bichkov, editor of the newspaper *Tsarsky Oprichnik* ("Tsar's Oprichnik"), called for the total extermination of the Jewish people. When he added that "If you are a Russian, then you should kill a kike" the room erupted into applause. As an example of how dangerous some of these neo-Nazis are when they go from rhetoric to practice, the head of the People's National Party mentioned above, Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevsky, was severely injured on October 3, 2003 when a bomb he was working on in his Moscow apartment accidentally exploded, knocking down an interior wall and shattering windows. The fact that he was working on a bomb on the eve of the most sacred Jewish holiday Yom Kippur may not have been a coincidence.

In Saratov, police consistently refuse to protect the Jewish community against regular attacks by neo-Nazis. In September 2002, the Prosecutor's Office of Saratov's Kirov District refused a request from the local Jewish community to open a criminal investigation of a series of

³ Ibid.

antisemitic incidents that took place the previous month. In a letter dated September 20, 2002, an investigator for the Prosecutor's Office named V. A. Guzenko informed Saratov's chief rabbi Mikhoel Frumin of his office's refusal to begin an investigation based on Article 282 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits hate crimes and hate speech. Mr. Guzenko listed the reasons Rabbi Furman brought the complaint: Graffiti reading "Kikes out" and "Death to the kikes" was painted on the synagogue's fence over the course of two days—September 6-8. In addition, during the same period, a small explosive device was thrown at the synagogue during services, not causing any damage, but frightening the congregation. Nevertheless, the Prosecutor's Office found no evidence of a crime that could be prosecuted under Article 282 "since these actions were not directed at inciting ethnic, racial or religious hatred, do not undermine trust and respect towards a defined ethnicity or race or religious faith, nor do they show the harmfulness, unworthiness, unattractiveness or limitations of people of a concrete ethnicity."

In an October 2002 press conference, chief rabbi Frumin criticized local law enforcement officials for doing little to protect the Jewish community against a series of antisemitic attacks. Rabbi Frumin condemned the decision by the city prosecutor's office to not open a criminal investigation of recent vandalism against the synagogue. Rabbi Frumin argued that these incidents, as well as an April 2002 firebombing of the synagogue, take place because of the weak reaction of local police. As a result, many local Jews live in fear. Unlike in some other cities, the Saratov Jewish community tries to keep a low profile by not widely announcing religious or cultural events; nevertheless, skinheads often find out about them somehow and show up to disrupt Jewish events or, at best, silently intimidate the congregation with their presence. Recently, neo-Nazi youths disrupted a Jewish children's dance performance by shouting antisemitic slogans. Jewish Agency representative Bella Zueva confirmed the rabbi's information at the press conferences and added that the situation in small towns in the Saratov region is even worse than in the regional capital.

In an article about antisemitism in Saratov Oblast published in the November 29, 2001 issue of *Obshchaya Gazeta* ("General Newspaper"), Sergey Pochechuev—press secretary of the Saratov synagogue—is quoted as saying the following: "In Saratov nowadays it has become unsafe. Over the past year, the Jewish cemetery has been attacked five times. On the night of October 8, nine gravestones were destroyed. On the night of the 15th, there were over 60. The Kirovsky ROVD [district police] are investigating. But the culprits have not once been found. In the Spring, a Molotov cocktail shattered on the roof of the synagogue. A fire didn't break out due to good luck—a parishioner saw it in time. We cannot open a Sunday school in the synagogue since we cannot guarantee the total safety of the children. You can find everything in Saratov book stalls, including 'Mein Kampf.' Luckily, those who do the pogroms [The attacks on the cemetery] don't read books. However, their potential leaders can read them." The article also described the recent decision by Saratov authorities to start a criminal case against an antisemitic writer, based on a law banning the incitement of ethnic hatred—the first time this law has been applied in Saratov Oblast. However, nothing has resulted from that criminal investigation, and nobody has been arrested for any of the antisemitic crimes described above.

On January 25, 2004 an explosive device attached to a sign with an antisemitic slogan exploded in Moscow, according to a January 27, 2004 report by newsru.com. The explosion shattered nearby windows, but caused no casualties. Nobody has been arrested in connection with this or other booby-trapped antisemitic signs in Vladivostok, Moscow Oblast and the Kaliningrad region.

Molotov cocktails were thrown at a Chelyabinsk synagogue on the night of February 4, 2004 according to a February 5, 2004 report by the Sova Information-Analytical Center, citing a report by the Uralpolit.ru web site. The attack took place at 4AM, when unidentified people threw three Molotov cocktails at the synagogue building. Only one actually made it far enough; the other two fell into the snow. The arsonists threw another fire bomb through the window of the synagogue's library, making flames burst out around the building. Luckily, neighbors noticed the blaze and were able to extinguish it before the fire department arrived. Members of the local Jewish community believe that the attempted arson was an act of antisemitism, while police do not discount that theory, but add that it could also have been a case of simple "hooliganism." At the time of writing, there have been no arrests made in connection with this arson.

Throughout the summer of 2004, participating monitors in a European Commission-funded project to monitor xenophobia in Russia conducted interviews with Jewish leaders in several provincial cities. (UCSJ, the Moscow Helsinki Group and UCSJ's independent affiliate the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights are all grantees under this EC project). The interviews revealed widespread intimidation. For example, in Oryol, a region where local authorities actively cooperated with neo-Nazi groups throughout the 1990s, Tatyana Ponomaryova, director of the "Nesher" Jewish Public Charity Center, told the project monitor that minorities fear wearing articles of clothing or religious symbols that could identify them as non-Russians: "They are afraid to wear it. Children who want to wear it don't, because they are persuaded not to by their parents... [Parents] don't trust the police to protect them."

Echoing Ms. Ponomaryova, Nadezhda Nosova, chair of the Yaroslavl Jewish community, told the interviewer that: "When guests come, we advise them not to wear ethnic [Jewish] clothing, simply in the interests of self-preservation... Our [community] center has been attacked [vandalized] many times. Graffiti regularly appears on the walls of the center—'Death to the kikes' and swastikas." Antisemitism and xenophobia in general is getting worse in Yaroslavl, Ms. Nosova told the interviewer: "The grassroots (*bytovoy*) level [of xenophobia] is going up in recent months... Grassroots antisemitism always existed, in the Soviet times too. Nowadays little has changed when it comes to Jews."

Olga Ierusalimskaya, chairwoman of the Irkutsk Jewish Cultural Center, told her interviewer that while she was unaware of any recent attacks in the region on Jews or other minorities: "There's no way I would hang a sign on this office reading 'Jewish Cultural Center.' When we were located inside the building of the synagogue [which was severely damaged in an accidental fire a month before the interview], twice rocks were thrown through the windows while I was there." Ms. Ierusalimskaya had some harsh words for local law enforcement agencies: "I am in regular contact with the FSB. I have the impression that law enforcement agencies fight against xenophobia only in words, but in reality, nobody actively fights against it."

In Kurgan, Garik Dobrusin—leader of the local Jewish community—told the interviewer that local authorities support an extremist nationalist organization called the Russian National Cultural Autonomy (RNKA). The RNKA is invited to official meetings alongside ethnic and religious minority leaders, and Governor Bogomolov himself gave the leader of the RNKA a hug and thanked him, Mr. Dobrusin charged. When a group of rabbis came to the region to celebrate a Jewish holiday, Governor Bogomolov himself ordered local press not to cover their visit, according to Mr. Dobrusin. Antisemitic leaflets and graffiti are common, and the RNU is active in the region. Sometimes supporters of the Communist Party have made public antisemitic statements.

On the evening of July 6, 2004 12 gravestones in the old Jewish cemetery of Makhachkala, Russia (Republic of Dagestan) were desecrated, according to a July 9, 2004 report by the AEN news service. The cemetery has been regularly vandalized starting in the 1990s—at least five times in 2003 alone—yet not one criminal investigation has been started by local police, and nobody has been brought to justice for the attacks, according to the AEN report. In addition, AEN reported that threats against the Jewish community in Dagestan have multiplied, especially centering around the construction of a new synagogue building in Makhachkala. Antisemites have reportedly approached construction workers laboring on the project and threatened them, claiming that they will blow the building site up. According to Mr. Dibiyayev, these threats have scared off all but three of the construction workers.

There are some exceptions to the rule—occasionally Russian authorities do arrest culprits involved in antisemitic attacks. For example, on July 5, 2004 police in Tomsk arrested two suspects in a July 2002 antisemitic bombing. The suspects, who have been linked to several murders in the region, allegedly attached a sign with the slogan “Death to the Yids” to a grenade. The resulting explosion injured two. Several explosive devices and other weapons were reportedly found in the suspects’ possession.

On August 2, 2004, three youths implicated in an antisemitic assault on the chairman of the Tula Judaic Religious Community were arrested, according to Semyon Bragilevsky, a Tula-based participating monitor in a European Commission-funded project to monitor xenophobia and antisemitism in Russia. The arrests took place after Evgeny Kats recognized three of the youths who beat him on June 28, 2004. One of them brazenly waved at Mr. Kats, who immediately called the police. The June 28 assault took place at noon near Mr. Kats’ home. Three youths approached him asking for a small amount of money, which he gave them. They then asked him “Who are you?” to which he replied with the same question. After answering in return “We are Christians,” the three allegedly started to beat Mr. Kats; two nearby youths then joined in the attack. Mr. Kats was then robbed of 1,500 rubles; strangely, his empty wallet was returned to one of his children later. Mr. Bragilevsky added in his report that the part of town where the assault took place—the Proletarian district—is filled with antisemitic graffiti, including swastikas and slogans like “Beat the kikes, save Russia!”

In the summer of 2004, two antisemitic incidents took place near Kostroma’s synagogue, a building that in recent years has been targeted multiple times by rock-throwing and graffiti-painting vandals, according to Andrey Osherov, a Kostroma-based participating monitor in a European Commission-funded project to monitor xenophobia in Russia. The first incident took place on July 24, 2004. An ethnic Russian youth who lives adjacent to the synagogue was assaulted near his home by a group of thugs, one of whom reportedly yelled “Take this, kike!” The victim’s cries of “What are you doing—I’m Russian!” did not dissuade his attackers. On August 10, three teenagers approached the fence surrounding the synagogue and started throwing rocks at the building’s windows. Fortunately, they were scared off by an approaching bicyclist before they could do any serious damage.

A recent case of police torture shows the special level of danger that Jews and other minorities face in Russia at the hands of at times brutal and bigoted law enforcement officials. The August 18, 2004 edition of the Khabarovsk newspaper *Amursky Meridian* reported that a prominent Jewish businessman in that city was beaten by antisemitic police. Back on March 20, 2004, Sergey Sofrin, identified as the general director of a local business, accompanied a friend and his

family to the local train station. A policeman approached the group, asking for identification and tickets. The officer then allegedly called them “Jewish mugs” (an antisemitic slur) and threatened to take them to the station. When Mr. Sofrin argued with the officer, he allegedly replied: “You, Jew, are coming with us to the station, we love to kill Jews there.” Another officer approached, and together they took Mr. Sofrin and his companions to a police vehicle, where they took all of their possessions and money (none of which were ever returned) and then drove them to the station.

At the station, they were allegedly beaten, handcuffed, and then taken to a doctor, who administered a test designed to detect drunkenness. The results showed “a mild level of intoxication,” at which point the group was again taken to the station and placed in a cell overnight. Mr. Sofrin and his friends were subjected to more insults (“Sit down, Jewish mugs” and “Well, how do you like our Promised Land?”) before they were released, without any record of their stay being recorded in the police log book. Mr. Sofrin explains his long silence out of fear that nobody within the law enforcement agencies would take any action on his behalf. The author of the article characterizes Mr. Sofrin’s experience as one of “hundreds” of similar cases of police abuse in the region.

On September 25, 2004 Dmitry Aron, whose father is chairman of the Jewish community of Yoshkar-Ola, Russia (Republic of Mari-El), was stabbed in the entryway to his apartment building, according to a September 27, 2004 report by the Regnum news service. A young man ambushed Mr. Aron, striking him several times with a sharp metal object (possibly a screwdriver) before fleeing. Mr. Aron dragged himself up to his home, where his parents called an ambulance. He was then hospitalized, though it is not clear in what condition. Dmitry’s father Mark has publicly clashed with local authorities on several occasions, having criticized what he termed local law enforcement agencies’ lackadaisical attitude towards solving cases of antisemitic vandalism. In August 2004, just one month before the attack, the official newspaper of the regional administration ran an article which defamed and threatened Mark Aron. No arrests have been reported in connection with this attack Local media sources subsequently reported that Mark Aron was removed from his leadership position in the Jewish community by members intimidated by the regional authorities’ attitude towards him.

The Or Avner Jewish Day School in Nizhny Novgorod was firebombed on the night of October 5, 2004. Fortunately, nobody was injured. No arrests have been reported in connection with this attack.

Ties Between Hate Groups and Local Authorities

In recent years, UCSJ has discovered numerous examples of collaboration between regional and municipal authorities and antisemitic hate groups, most notably the violent neo-Nazi group Russian National Unity (RNU). While the RNU itself has been severely weakened by a three way split at the end of 2000, and while in some cases the collaboration described in this section may no longer take place, the fact that local police and politicians thought in the very recent past that working with Russia’s most notorious hate groups was a good idea raises serious concerns about their attitudes towards Jews and other minority groups.

In some cases, regional leaders are openly antisemitic and/or racist. However, the main reason for collaboration with hate groups appears to be that poorly paid and badly trained police have not proven adequate in the struggle against crime, which has spiraled out of control in recent

years. Hate groups like the RNU or the vociferously antisemitic Kuban Cossack Host in Krasnodar Krai often offer to “maintain order” for free or at low cost, freeing up scarce resources for other uses. These groups often target not just Jews and other ethnic or religious minorities, but also human rights NGOs, liberal political activists and independent journalists, some of whom have proven to be a thorn in the side of regional officials.

In the late 1990s, local police worked together with RNU activists to patrol the streets of Kostroma, Voronezh and Yaroslavl and hold target practice together. According to UCSJ’s regional monitor, Lyudmila Komogortseva, the RNU and city police work together to “maintain order” in at least one night club in Bryansk. Similar cooperation took place in Stavropol, where the RNU guarded several schools, two hospitals and a maternity ward, and cooperated closely with military recruiters.

Despite a ban on the organization in Moscow, activists from the RNU still maintain a visible presence in the capital, regularly holding demonstrations or participating in demonstrations of other antisemitic groups. On the morning of February 24, 2002 UCSJ’s Moscow Bureau Chief Aleksandr Brod observed a “whole brigade” of around 20 RNU members wearing swastika berets, black uniforms and tall boots marching in formation out of the Taganskaya metro station. They were accompanied by about 100-150 un-uniformed youths and adult men, all heading towards a park near the Kuzminki metro station where the RNU usually holds rallies. In addition, Mr. Brod reports that leaflets with the RNU’s contact information are distributed in the Moscow metro two or three times a week, along with the organization’s mailing address and contact information, a clear sign that neo-Nazis feel a large degree of impunity in Moscow.

The RNU has 200 active members in Kirov Oblast and the RNU’s “patriotic” youth club “Kolovrat” (the RNU’s term for its modified swastika) operates in the city of Kirov with the support of the Department of Youth Affairs in one of the city’s regions, the Military Commisariat, the Inspector for Minors’ Affairs and the police.

In Tula Oblast, a region just to the south of Moscow, RNU members and sympathizers have been elected to the regional legislature, according to UCSJ’s local monitor.

The RNU has training camps outside of Voronezh and up to 1,000 youth have reportedly participated in their free combat training sessions. Despite years of promises from the local authorities to ban the RNU, in February 2001, the RNU’s successor organization—“Russian Rebirth”—was registered in Voronezh, the Republic of Mari-El, and Tver. This came on the heels of a decision to deny registration to a Jewish congregation in Voronezh, a decision that forced the congregation to disband.

The skinhead movement has grown rapidly since the late 1990s. Skinheads now exist in most Russian cities, ranging in number from a few hundred to several thousand in Moscow. While their primary targets are people from the Caucasus, Africa or Asia, skinheads are violently antisemitic as well. For example, in January 2002, skinheads attacked a 15 year old Jewish boy at the Galich train station (Kostroma region) as he was returning home. As a result, the boy required medical treatment for a concussion and several other injuries. There have been no arrests in connection with this attack (other antisemitic skinhead attacks are described above).

Some Local Authorities Incite Hatred Against Jews

In some cases, especially in Communist-dominated regions, media controlled by the local authorities or by the local branch of the ruling Communist Party publish articles inciting hatred against Jews. While the Kremlin's takeover of NTV and other formerly independent media showed how tenuous press freedom is on the national level under President Putin, the situation for the regional media in most parts of the country is much worse. In some regions, no independent press exists at all. Given these conditions, there is little doubt that newspapers published or subsidized by regional or municipal administrations—or by local “parties of power”—accurately reflect the local authorities’ “party line.” Therefore, if such publications run antisemitic material, this must be a reflection of the local authorities’ ideology, or at the very least their recognition that such antisemitic publishing appeals to a significant block of voters in the region.

Such articles, which clearly incite hatred against Jews, are explicitly banned under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code and the Russian law “On the Media.” However, these laws are very rarely enforced.

In Oryol, the official newspaper of the regional administration—*Orlovskaya Pravda* (“Oryol Truth”)—has published articles attacking local Jewish activists, unmasking “Zionist conspiracies,” comparing Zionism to racism and fascism, and even calling Monica Lewinsky an Israeli spy.

Newspapers close to the regional administration of Bryansk regularly publish antisemitic articles. On November 29, 2003 the newspaper *Bryansky Rabochy* (“Bryansk Worker”), which is subsidized and controlled by the Bryansk regional administration, compared Jewish religious rituals to Satanism. The article began with the author V. Sibiryakov saying that he went to the local synagogue to hear a concert by the Russian Jewish singer Barukh Finkelshtein. Mr. Sibiryakov’s first reaction was that “15 years ago in Bryansk and in the region Russian folk choruses and singers used to appear. But today, unfortunately, that is not the case,” implying that only Jews get to sing nowadays. The article commented on the rabbi’s speech before the concert and linked Jews to the destruction of the economy—a favorite Communist theme. “Up to that moment, information that there is a rabbi in Bryansk and that a synagogue has been organized here was not known to me,” Sibiryakov wrote. “It seems that democracy has given as a gift to Bryansk not just the destruction of factories and collective farms, but also a rabbi and a synagogue.” In a series of antisemitic slurs that followed, the writer compared Jewish religious songs to Russian Orthodox religious chants. While Church songs inspire peace and reflection, he argued, the “loud and rhythmic” Jewish songs “zombify people.” He concluded: “In such a case, with what sort of God can you be unified, perhaps instead with Satan and dark forces.”

President Putin Has Praised Antisemitic Politicians

Despite his public gestures towards the Jewish community and his condemnation of antisemitism, President Putin has made several statements that warm the hearts of extremist nationalists in Russia, most famously his promise—in the vulgar slang of the Russian criminal world—to “waste the [Chechen] terrorists, even in the outhouse.” He has awarded medals to ultra-nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the openly antisemitic former governor of Krasnodar Kray Nikolai Kondratenko, who now represents Krasnodar in the Russian parliament, where he continues to incite hatred against Jews with public statements blaming “Zionists” for everything from “inventing” homosexuality to being behind a law allowing the importation of

nuclear waste into Russia. The estimated 12,000 Jews who live in Krasnodar could not have drawn much comfort from their president's implicit endorsement of such a prominent Jew-hater.

Equally worrisome, under President Putin, two institutions that have been traditionally hostile to Jews, the security services and the military, have gained more political prominence than at any time since the collapse of the Soviet Union. He has relied on the security services and the military to fill numerous high positions. Both institutions were bastions of antisemitism under the Soviet regime, and it is unlikely that such attitudes have completely disappeared a mere decade after the collapse of the USSR. Five of the seven presidential plenipotentiaries that the president appointed early in his term in a bid to re-centralize control over the country were career KGB or military men. The first envoy for the North-West region, Viktor Cherkesov, has the dubious honor of making the last known arrest on political charges in Soviet history. Mr. Cherkesov's former press secretary, Yevgeny Lukin, recently wrote a book that blames Jews for the mass killings the Soviet regime committed after the Revolution. Mr. Lukin went on to become chief of information at St. Petersburg Television (controlled by the city authorities), which broadcast a show inciting pogroms shortly after his appointment. Mr. Lukin is not an isolated case—two prominent extremist leaders, General Aleksandr Sterligov, who once declared that he would “not give the country to the Jews to tear it to pieces,” and Stanislav Terentev, the editor of the vociferously antisemitic newspaper *Kolokol* (“The Bell”), are former KGB officers.

Conclusion

Given these facts, especially the general lack of police protection from antisemitic violence and the growth of extremist nationalist sentiment in Russia, as demonstrated by the results of the December 2003 parliamentary elections and the explosive growth of the neo-Nazi skinhead movement, it is clear that Russia remains a dangerous place for Jews. The country's corrupt and dysfunctional justice system, staffed by many judges and prosecutors who have shown antisemitic bias, often fails to offer adequate protection from antisemitic abuses. Police officials and prosecutors routinely classify ethnically and religiously motivated violence as ordinary assaults and murders, lending credibility to human rights groups' charges that deliberate obfuscation by law enforcement agencies of the issue of hate crimes against Jews and some other minorities is taking place on a massive scale. Continued vigilance and pressure from Jewish and human rights groups on these issues, especially reform of the justice system, is necessary to ensure the Jewish community's future safety in Russia.