



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

"The Voice of Emigration, Jewish Survival, and Human Rights in the Former Soviet Union Since 1970"

P.O. Box 11676 ♦ Cleveland Park ♦ Washington, D.C. 20008 ♦ (202) 237-8262 ♦ Fax (202) 237-2236
E-mail: ucsj@ucsj.com ♦ Web: <http://www.fsmonitor.com>

Yosef I. Abramowitz
President

Micah H. Naftalin
National Director

BRIEFING PAPER

“HATE CRIMES, RULE OF LAW AND FOREIGN POLICY CONCERNING THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, UKRAINE AND BELARUS”

In Support of Testimony by

Micah H. Naftalin, National Director
Nickolai Butkevich, Research and Advocacy Director

To

THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

(THE HELSINKI COMMISSION)

Rm. 1539 Longworth House Office Building

November 6, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Members and Staff of the Helsinki Commission, and Guests.

My name is Micah H. Naftalin. Since 1987 – nearly 21 years – I have been the National Director of UCSJ. I am joined today by Nickolai Butkevich, UCSJ's director of research and advocacy, the author of Part II of this paper. We wish to acknowledge the contribution to this Briefing Paper of Dr. Leonid Stonov, director and coordinator of UCSJ's monitoring Bureaus in the FSU, and Charles Fenyesi, editor of UCSJ's weekly electronic newsletter, Bigotry Monitor.

It is not commonly understood that, historically, this subset of human rights issues has not placed high enough among the priorities of the human rights campaigns' canon, nor has it achieved the priority it deserves in the conduct of diplomacy and in foreign policy strategic thinking. UCSJ is pleased that this is changing. A singular exception to this glum generalization has been the venue for strategic analysis of human rights obstacles long provided by the Helsinki Commission.

Your call for a briefing on this vital set of issues, and the related briefings and hearings you are contemplating, could not be more timely and important. There should be no mistaking the threat to democracy and national security posed by today's gathering global storm of antisemitic and xenophobic hate crimes and propaganda, aided and abetted by patently corrupt and dysfunctional criminal justice systems. These factors have empowered the sworn enemies of peace and

democracy in ways not seen since the worst days of the Cold War.

I. Overview and Background of UCSJ

In response to your most welcome invitation, this briefing paper and testimony address the extraordinary threat of the impunity that perpetrators of hate crimes, propaganda, and related matters of discrimination of ethnic and religious minorities, enjoy in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus. These issues have a long and bitter history in each country and we document in detail their current status as one of three central and related themes. While antisemitic language is endemic to the traditions and propaganda of fascists, Communists, nationalists, Neo-Nazi skinheads and Islamo-fascist extremists in all three countries--all targeting America as well as indigenous minorities--Jews are not the majority targets of physical violence in Belarus and Russia. This “honor” goes to dark-skinned people—predominantly Muslim migrants from other parts of the former Soviet Union, a wide variety of indigenous non-Russian minorities, Roma, and foreign dark-skinned students from developing countries. In Ukraine, however, the targets of hate crimes are predominantly Jews.

The very existence of the impunity that perpetrators of hate crimes and discrimination enjoy, as we document here, is a monstrous violation of citizens’ human rights, as guaranteed by international treaties. What’s more, the failure of these governments to effectively combat this scourge, and their connivance with it, constitutes an extremely useful bellwether, the systematic monitoring of which provides rule of law metrics to measure the extent to which their respective justice systems are corrupt and dysfunctional.

It is critically important to understand that promoting human rights is not an isolated, “feel good” goal. It has profound relevance, too often minimized, to the conduct of a realist foreign policy. The absence of rule of law leads inexorably to a lack of accountability that empowers not only authoritarian governance but just as importantly provides cover for the Kremlin's expressed bellicosity toward America and democracy in general, as well as its alarming support of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Recently, the U.N. Rapporteur on Racism Doudou Diene concluded that “racist violence constitutes the most serious threat to the democratic process in the Russian Federation,” according to a June 13, 2007 report by the Russian Jewish web site Jewish.ru. Hate crimes and religious discrimination are exceedingly well documented in the Department of State's annual country reports on human rights and religious freedom. These reports derive from the continuing dispatches sent to Washington from American embassies that, in turn, benefit from the input provided by the monitoring of human rights and religious freedom NGOs on the ground, including, for the three countries discussed here, UCSJ and MHG. These country reports represent the “gold standard” for governmental efforts to cite serious violations of internationally imposed human rights standards.

Unfortunately, there is a serious disconnect between our government's strong assessments and rhetoric from the human rights precincts of the State Department, and the relative failure of foreign policy leaders to negotiate for critically needed reforms that would promote human rights. We seek to infuse rule of law goals and process into the fabric and conduct of statecraft. Given the real and practical limitations on all democratic governments' ability to bring human

rights considerations up to parity with concerns for, e.g., nuclear proliferation, trade and energy reliability, our second theme, thus, explores the imperative need that diplomatic strategy strive to support and take better advantage of the complementary opportunities and influence of a mobilized public linked to the NGO community.

This goal, of course, is built into the Helsinki Process, where it had resounding influence on the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. Today, the issues have surfaced again, projecting no less ominous consequences than before. The Helsinki Commission and OSCE play a vital role in this. Beyond current concerns for the strength of election monitors, we encourage strengthening OSCE's role in the face of Russia's hostility to the agenda of the "third basket," an even stronger relationship between ODIHR and hate crimes-monitoring NGOs, and the developing of special criteria for ODIHR to assess the relationship of hate crimes and rule of law to promoting democracy and international security.

Our third theme analyzes the role of the courageous human rights and religious freedom NGOs and activists who, more than ever, require assistance and moral support in combating hate crimes and discrimination. Central to this discussion are the work and goals of our recently established and unprecedented Coalition Against Hate, an international partnership, initiated in cooperation with the Moscow Helsinki Group, of 30 religious freedom and human rights NGOs and analysis centers across Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. [A directory of the participating NGOs is attached.] Employing modern coordinating and communication techniques, including a common, interactive and bi-lingual blog of the same name, the Coalition will be the central address for monitoring and advocacy concerning hate crimes.

Importantly, the international Coalition Against Hate will also incorporate, mentor and strengthen burgeoning NGOs of the human rights and anti-fascist youth movement. These represent the continuity and hope for a future human rights presence in the face of highly organized neo-Nazi skinheads and the Kremlin-organized and supported Nashi youth network that has been established largely for nationalistic, anti-American and pro-Putin pre-election propaganda.

Since 1970, UCSJ has pioneered within the human rights NGO community the monitoring of antisemitism, xenophobia and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities in the Soviet Union and its successor states. UCSJ established in Moscow its Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law in 1990, the first Western human rights NGO to be officially registered in the history of the USSR. In the early 1990s, it established similar monitoring bureaus in six additional post-Soviet states: Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and Ukraine.

The majority of our financial support derives from the charitable donations of individual citizens. Since the late 1990s, however, our monitoring network, especially in the Russian Federation, has been supported by occasional grants from, e.g., the National Endowment for Democracy, USAID and the Department of State, the European Commission, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Our monitors throughout these countries, who specialize in antisemitic and xenophobic hate crimes, provide the core of our reporting. Their input is enhanced by our continuous review of national and local media, public reports, and the reports of sister human rights NGOs, chief among which is the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG).

II. Hate Crimes in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus: Recent Incidents and Trends

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Vladimir Putin's seven years in power have featured a dramatic rollback in freedoms in Russia. Former KGB officers now dominate the government and much of the business world, both in Moscow and in the provinces. Opposition activists are routinely harassed, marginalized in the press and, in some cases, beaten or even murdered.

In the preamble to its 2006 report on human rights in Russia, the US State Department reports that: "Continuing centralization of power in the executive branch, a compliant State Duma, political pressure on the judiciary, intolerance of ethnic minorities, corruption and selectivity in enforcement of the law, continuing media restrictions and self-censorship, and harassment of some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) resulted in an erosion of the accountability of government leaders to the population."

These findings, consistent with UCSJ monitoring and reporting, are roundly echoed by other international human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Freedom House, which in 2006 rated Russia as "not free" for the first time since the break up of the Soviet Union.

Despite official rhetoric, the authorities have never truly gotten serious about tackling the problems of antisemitism and xenophobia. Somewhat improved police practices since 2001 have not stemmed the tide of antisemitic and racist violence, which is clearly on the upswing. According to the Sova Information-Analytical Center, there were 435 hate crimes in 2005, 575 in 2006, and so far this year 453, including 53 murders.

While these numbers seem small compared to similar figures in the United States and Europe, there are several factors in Russia that artificially depress hate crimes statistics. Fear of the notoriously brutal police, combined with a general sense that they do not take hate crimes seriously, and the fact that some police agencies have collaborated with neo-Nazi groups, leads to a general reluctance amongst some minorities to report hate crimes. Many of the victims are present in the country illegally, and have obvious reasons to avoid contact with the authorities.

In addition, law enforcement agencies in some regions continue to cover up hate crimes, either by refusing to enter them in the record at all, or by reporting them as ordinary assaults, murders, or "acts of hooliganism" rather than as hate crimes.

The reaction of Moscow police officials to a deadly series of hate crimes on October 20, 2007 is a perfect example of this problem. Four ethnic minorities were stabbed during a rampage by a group of youths that day, according to an October 23, 2007 report in the national daily "Komsomolskaya Pravda." The violence broke out on Saturday after a soccer match. The mob marched around the southern part of the city attacking anybody they saw who did not look like an ethnic Russian. The first victim was a well-known chess player from Yakutiya, Sergey Nikolaev, who was stabbed to death. Two other victims--Rasulzhon Gulishov and Galib Kabilov--were set upon in separate attacks. Both were hospitalized in serious condition. Finally,

Ovanes Aymuryan was stabbed to death near the Chertanovskaya metro station.

Moscow's chief police spokesman initially denied that the attacks were motivated by ethnic hatred, issuing a categorical assertion less than 24 hours after the crime that the victims were simply “in the wrong place at the wrong time” and that one of those killed could not have been a victim of a hate crime because he is a Russian citizen. The victim was, however, an ethnic minority, and neo-Nazis are not known to check their victims' passports before they kill them.

In the meantime, police investigators recovered a cell phone with a video of the murder of Sergey Nikolaev and the beating of the ethnic Uzbek victim, as well as extremist literature, inside the suspects' apartments. Perhaps because of the negative publicity generated by the police spokesman's comments, they now face murder, aggravated assault, and incitement of ethnic hatred charges.

President Putin has contradicted his tolerant rhetoric by promoting openly xenophobic parties, most explicitly during the December 2003 parliamentary elections, when government-controlled television swamped the airwaves with positive coverage of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's extremist nationalist party the LDPR, and the extremist nationalist Motherland party. Both of these parties, which, along with the Communist Party, included candidates who campaigned on an explicitly antisemitic platform, won 1/3 of the party-list vote, bringing to power a radically nationalistic parliament, inside of which antisemitic literature is distributed and antisemitic speeches made with impunity. Given this context, it is no surprise that in January 2005, 19 members of the parliament sent a letter to the Prosecutor General's office terming Judaism a “Satanic” religion and accusing Jews of ritually murdering and drinking the blood of Christian children.

Responding to criticism that their antisemitic incitement may have played a role in the January 2006 stabbings of eight worshipers at the Bolshaya Bronnaya synagogue in Moscow by a young neo-Nazi, Motherland leaders struck back by warning of further violence against Jews if the Russian Jewish leadership and the media continue to criticize “patriotic” parties. Motherland leader Dmitry Rogozin, who is reportedly about to be named Russia's ambassador to NATO, blamed a “Zionist” conspiracy for the attack and warned that Jews face “mass extermination” if they keep up their supposedly anti-Russian activities. The second most important Motherland figure—deputy speaker of the State Duma Sergey Baburin—responded by joining a recently revived pre-Revolutionary organization (The Union of Russian People) that organized pogroms against Jews in the first decades of the 20th century. Two other Motherland members of parliament later gave speeches to the same violence-inciting organization.

A month before the election, the Kremlin's ally Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (head of the LDPR, which doubled its seats in the December 2003 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.” On May 16, 2005, Mr. Zhirinovskiy and two of his LDPR comrades in the State Duma held a roundtable discussion inside the parliament. Mr. Zhirinovskiy claimed that Jews “dominated” the early Soviet government and Yeltsin's liberal cabinets in the early 1990s, which implemented deeply unpopular policies. LDPR deputy Sergey Abeltsev argued that Jews “humiliated” Germans by opening a Holocaust memorial in

Berlin, and along with fellow LDPR deputy Evgeny Ivanov, called for fewer non-Russians in the Russian government.

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." In a June 2006 interview, he compared Zionism to cancer. Another now member of parliament, 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.

When the Motherland party became too independent in 2005, Kremlin political strategists engineered a split within its ranks and pushed out Mr. Rogozin and most of the other hard-core nationalists. However, with the December 2007 parliamentary elections looming, those same demagogic politicians were encouraged to join the Just Russia Party, which the Kremlin set up as a fake opposition party to "compete" with the Kremlin's party United Russia. This latest attempt to pander to nationalist voters was initially successful, until President Putin firmly allied himself with United Russia a couple of months ago, thus neutralizing the chances of any opposition party, genuine or ersatz, other than the Communists from making it into the next Duma.

Russian government leaders' praiseworthy rhetoric condemning racist violence do not seem to have filtered down very well to lower level officials, including police, prosecutors and judges. Statements by the president on the need to combat xenophobia and hate crimes are often contradicted by top law enforcement officials denying that such problems even exist. For example, in December 2006 the head of the FSB (former KGB) Nikolai Patrushev stated in a newspaper interview that reports of racist violence in Russia were being exaggerated by external and internal enemies of the country. Such statements seem never to draw rebukes from President Putin.

Antisemitic and racist demonstrations by neo-Nazi skinheads, Communists, and Russian Orthodox fundamentalists in Moscow take place on a regular basis and are rarely blocked by the police, despite the fact that they are clearly illegal under Article 282 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits the incitement of ethnic or religious hatred. City officials in Moscow have instead granted permits for blatantly racist rallies, such as a November 4, 2005 march that featured 3,000 far-right extremists, some of whom demonized migrants, raised their hands in the fascist salute, and held antisemitic signs. At the same time, peaceful demonstrations by opposition and gay rights activists have been violently dispersed by the police, or, more commonly, denied permission to rally on specious grounds. At the time of writing, Russian media sources are reporting that the Moscow city government has granted permission for yet another neo-fascist march in Moscow on November 4.

With over 50% of the Russian public responding positively in polls to the far-right slogan “Russia for the ethnic Russians,” the Kremlin is increasingly catering to nationalistic voters. Government propaganda bombards citizens with hysterical reporting on international events that create an image of Russia surrounded by enemies, including countries like Georgia and Estonia, whose size and geopolitical gravitas pale in comparison to Russia. The US and Britain come in for especially harsh criticism in the government-controlled media, especially in connection with alleged spy scandals.

The mass deportation of ethnic Georgians from Russia last year was the most sickening result of this campaign of fear. Thousands of Georgians were rounded up in the wake of a diplomatic row, and while many were present in the country illegally, some had their papers in order, and a few were even Russian citizens. Two died in detention.

In reaction to a race riot in the remote northern town of Kondopoga, President Putin pushed a law through the State Duma that banned foreigners from trading in Russian markets, even though the Kondopoga riot stemmed from a clash in a bar rather than a market. For the first time, President Putin used the phrase “the native peoples of Russia” in a speech—an obvious gesture to nationalists. The result of this law—increased suffering for already exploited migrant laborers, higher prices for Russian consumers, and more frequent bribes going into the pockets of police promising to look the other way as foreign market traders continue to work—is a perfect example of the cruel stupidity of government sanctioned racism.

Finally, after suffering decades of repression, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has greatly expanded in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. While this is a very positive development, there are also disturbing trends that accompany the ROC's rebirth, especially having to do with its relationship with the state. The ROC hierarchy seems to believe that the best way to compete with the dynamic growth of minority Christian congregations, especially Protestants, is not to engage in free competition with them, but rather to harness the repressive powers of the bureaucracy to stifle their growth. Many officials, both provincial and federal, seem to agree, and have targeted minority Christian congregations with a variety of obstacles to registration, excessive safety and tax inspections, refusals to allow church groups to rent premises for public events, and scurrilous press campaigns in media controlled by local authorities that demonize minority Christians as “totalitarian sects,” con artists, and spies for the West. Most disturbing of all, much of this spy mania rhetoric has been echoed at the highest levels of Russia's security apparatus, which views Western missionaries as being part of a plot aimed at dividing Russia along religious lines.

For example, according to an October 29, 2007 report by the Forum 18 News Service, which monitors religious freedom in the former Soviet Union: “The Glorification Pentecostal Church in the Siberian city of Abakan was forced to demolish its worship building after a court ruled that it did not conform to building regulations... A Pentecostal church in Kaluga has faced repeated criminal investigations into its school after it narrowly avoided having its church building confiscated.” This is just the most recent such report available--Forum 18's web site is filled with similar reports from this and past years.

The Forum 18 report added that a mosque in Astrakhan also faces possible demolition at the hands of local authorities, who reportedly did not feel comfortable with the idea of it being

located in the downtown area. While the ROC's top hierarchy regularly meets with top Muslim leaders and declares Islam a “traditional” religion in Russia deserving of respect, some ROC dioceses have led campaigns against mosque construction, especially in regions far from traditionally Muslim areas (Karelia, Kamchatka, etc.). The involvement of some ROC priests in these xenophobic campaigns points to the dangers posed by a small but very active extremist wing within the ROC made up of ultra-conservative priests, a few bishops, and members of Orthodox lay brotherhoods who in addition to targeting Muslims, engage in the traditional bashing of Jews as “Christ killers.” *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and texts containing blood libels have been distributed in some ROC churches and bookstalls, and ROC priests and loosely affiliated lay persons with some influence within the extremist wing of the church were among the signatories to “The Letter of the 500” which echoed the blood libel and reference to Judaism as a “Satanic” religion found in the open letter signed by 19 members of the Duma in 2005 (see above). The ROC hierarchy has done little to oppose these activities.

What’s more, the effort in some regions to teach ROC theology in public schools obviously violates the Constitution, which stipulates that Russia is a secular state. Five regions have even gone so far as to make these classes compulsory, regardless of the religious beliefs (or lack of belief) of the students or their parents. One of the main textbooks used in these courses—“The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” by Alla Borodina--asks students to answer the question “Why did the Jews crucify Christ and why can they not attain the Kingdom of Heaven?” Her answer--because Jews are too concerned with material gain.

UKRAINE

Unlike during the Soviet period, today the central government of Ukraine does not have an official policy of state sponsored antisemitism, and has made friendly gestures towards the Jewish community. Jews play a prominent role in the country’s business circles, and aside from occasional problems with restitution of property confiscated by the Soviet government, do not face government obstacles to the free practice of their religion. Nevertheless, serious problems remain that leave Jews and other minorities vulnerable.

The (mostly) good intentions of the weak and dysfunctional central government don’t always filter down to the lower levels of the bureaucracy, especially the police, prosecutors, the courts and the SBU (the former KGB), which are still largely staffed by officials appointed during the years of Soviet state-sponsored antisemitism.

Laws banning the incitement of ethnic or religious hatred were successfully applied only once in the entire post-Soviet history of Ukraine. That decision, which resulted in the court-ordered shut down of the pro-Yushchenko newspaper *Silski Visti* for inciting antisemitism, was overturned after President Yushchenko came to power; President Yushchenko subsequently awarded medals to the paper’s editors on two occasions. The sense of impunity stemming from this lack of enforcement has led to widespread antisemitic publishing in the country.

Similarly, a law banning hate crimes was successfully applied only once (against skinheads who attacked a synagogue in Kiev in 2002), despite numerous other attacks on Jews and other minorities. Even in that case, the convicted ringleader of the attack, a notorious Kiev neo-Nazi

leader, later had his sentence reduced and is now a free man.

A poll released in December 2006 found that one in three Ukrainians do not want Jews to be citizens of their country, according to a December 7, 2006 report by JTA. Conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, the survey found that 36% of respondents do not want to see Jews as citizens of Ukraine, compared to 26% in a similar survey conducted in 1994. Researchers also found that antisemitic attitudes were especially widespread among younger respondents (45% of 18-20 year olds in Ukraine do not want Jews to live in Ukraine).

Antisemitic incidents have become more frequent and violent since 2002. Local officials sometimes turn a blind eye towards antisemitic hate groups and publications, and some members of parliament base their whole careers on demonizing Jews, yet they are rarely sanctioned or even criticized by the central government. Antisemitic attacks often do not result in any arrests, leaving the strong impression that police do not seriously investigate such incidents.

In just four days at the end of September 2007, three separate attacks on Jews were reported in Sevastopol, Cherkassy, and Zhitomir, capping a summer that featured at least three other antisemitic assaults. In addition, on October 5, 2007 the home of a rabbi in Uzhgorod was vandalized and set on fire.

These attacks have three factors in common: most took place near a synagogue or Jewish community center in what appear to have been well-planned ambushes; the victims were all religiously observant, and therefore extremely visible, Jews; and most disturbing of all, with the exception of the Sevastopol attack, police have failed to make any arrests.

Some Jewish leaders have responded with sharp criticism of the government's inaction in the face of escalating antisemitic and racist violence. Rabbi Ariel Chaikin, Chabad's chief rabbi of Ukraine, responded to a series of attacks in Zhitomir with an open letter to Ukrainian officials decrying the fact that Jews "feel that they are in danger" in that city. "They are constantly threatened, they are insulted on the street, and people throw things at them," he wrote.

According to UCSJ's Kiev monitor Vyacheslav Likhachyov, at least 55 racist attacks took place in Ukraine since October 2006, including ten against Jews, with Africans, Asians, and Arabs making up the bulk of the remainder. Seven of the victims died.

What are the factors behind this wave of violence, aside from the historical dislike of Jews endemic to the region? One obvious change is the emergence of a neo-Nazi movement in Ukraine. While not as numerous as their comrades in Russia, where neo-Nazi gangs came on the scene a full decade earlier, Ukrainian neo-Nazis are just as violent. It is probably not a coincidence that they are most active in regions of Ukraine that have close cultural and political ties to Russia. This raises the distinct possibility that Russian neo-Nazi groups are cooperating with their comrades across the border.

The main difference is that in Ukraine, Jews are the primary target. Since 1991, millions of people from the predominantly Muslim south of what used to be the Soviet Union have migrated to Russia. While attacks against Jews still take place in Russia with disturbing regularity, the

extreme right there is more focused on Muslims, whom they perceive as a greater threat.

In Ukraine, migration flows are considerably lower, and Islamophobia is a less potent force. Instead, Jews are the neo-Nazis' primary target, a sentiment stoked by some politicians, including members of parliament, who in recent years have publicly incited violence against Jews and accused them of everything from looting the country's banks to involvement in Stalin's genocidal famine of the 1930s. With the exception of Oleg Tyagnybok, who was expelled from President Yushchenko's political party after a particularly bloodthirsty speech, no Ukrainian politician has ever faced negative consequences for demonizing Jews.

Since 2003, Ukraine has surpassed Russia in the number of antisemitic incidents recorded year by year in our monitoring efforts. With the country in a cycle of political instability since the Orange Revolution, opportunities for unscrupulous politicians to profit from stoking antisemitic sentiment are likely to increase. If so, more violence will surely follow.

BELARUS

In Belarus, the legacy of the Soviet period is readily apparent.

Over the years, UCSJ's main source of information on antisemitism in Belarus has been our correspondent in Minsk Yakov Basin, along with monitors reporting to him. Unfortunately, as a result of his work for UCSJ, Mr. Basin has suffered extensive official harassment, culminating in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-ordered shut down of all UCSJ operations in Belarus in 2004.

The near total lack of an independent media in Belarus, combined with the large amount of government pressure put on Mr. Basin and other rights leaders to remain silent about antisemitism and other human rights abuses, has created an information vacuum much more severe than in Russia or Ukraine, countries with similar histories of antisemitism and similarly poor economic conditions. It is therefore highly likely that because of the repressive political climate in Belarus, available information about antisemitism there is just the tip of the iceberg.

Like in Russia and Ukraine, there have been several incidents of physical and verbal antisemitic violence in Belarus in recent years, incidents that the government has been reluctant to seriously investigate or even condemn (for example, the country's hate crimes legislation has only been successfully applied once since the collapse of the Soviet Union).

The government of Belarus combines some of the worst elements of the repressive Soviet system with the dangerous consequences of post-Soviet chaos and poverty. These factors include: a repressive, Soviet style government with a proven willingness to "disappear" or otherwise physically punish those who stand up against the regime, either directly or, according to some opposition groups, through the use of proxies like the neo-Nazi group Russian National Unity; an information vacuum resulting from severe government repression of independent media and independent NGOs; a dictator who has publicly made antisemitic remarks; and the almost total lack of police protection from grassroots antisemites. Unlike every other former Soviet republic, the Belarusian security service has not even bothered to rename itself; it is still called the KGB and acts accordingly.

President Lukashenko has made statements that indicate personal hostility towards Jews and does nothing to stop some of his subordinates within the executive branch and allies in the national parliament from illegally inciting hatred against them (Belarusian law bans hate speech, a statute that is rarely enforced). In a 1995 interview, President Lukashenko praised Adolf Hitler in an interview with Germany's *Handelsblatt* newspaper, saying that he would emulate his governing style: "Not everything that was connected to a certain Adolf Hitler in Germany was bad. Remember his rule in Germany. The German order had grown over centuries. Under Hitler, this process reached its culmination. This is perfectly in line with our understanding of a presidential republic and the role of its president."

On December 16, 1998 in a prime-time interview with Russia's Mayak radio network, President Lukashenko asserted that Jews in the Russian media are to blame for antisemitism. Two days later, in an evening interview with the Russian television network RTR, Lukashenko insisted that Jews in the Russian government and media are responsible for antisemitism because they have allegedly damaged Russia's economy. Lukashenko warned that the activities of the infamous Russian Jewish businessman Boris Berezovsky "might result in Jewish pogroms in Russia" and claimed that "the main antisemites in Russia are representatives of the Jewish population." In both interviews, Lukashenko rather implausibly tried to sugarcoat his antisemitic message by claiming that he himself is not an antisemite.

On February 17, 2000, President Lukashenko awarded Nikolai Kondratenko, Russia's most infamous antisemite and the then-governor of Russia's Krasnodar Krai, with Belarus' Order of Honor—"For energetic activity to expand economic ties between Krasnodar Krai and Belarus." Russia's leading newspaper *Izvestiya* characterized Lukashenko and Kondratenko as birds of a feather, writing that: "Lukashenko's sympathies for Russia's Communists, 'patriots' and antisemites are generally known." Mr. Kondratenko regularly accuses Jews of destroying the USSR, plotting to pollute Russia with nuclear waste, and even somehow "inventing" homosexuality.

Earlier this month, President Lukashenko seemed to imply that Jews are dirty during a press conference in Russia. Speaking about shoddy conditions in the city of Bobruysk, the president said: "Well, obviously, it is a Jewish town. The Jews do not care for the place they live in, look at Israel, I have been there." He used the word "pigsty" to describe the city, which seemed like a calculated insult to the Jewish community, known for its intense aversion to pigs.

Some of President Lukashenko's allies and subordinates are not shy about using antisemitic rhetoric. In a November 4, 2002 interview with the Mediafakt news agency, Sergey Kostyan—Co-Chair of the Belarusian parliament's International Affairs Committee and a close ally of President Lukashenko—compared Israel to Nazi Germany and claimed that non-Russians control Russia, according to UCSJ's Belarus correspondent. Commenting on the terrorist seizure of hostages in a Moscow theater, Mr. Kostyan argued that such terrorist acts will continue "until Russians start to rule Russia." He then added that, "The USA is the real terrorist," especially the US Congress, because it finances "anti-Belarusian" activity. Mr. Kostyan then managed to defame both the US and Israel in one stroke with the following incredible assertion: "We remember how Hitler covered all of Europe with tanks, and the USA supported him. Today, Israel is taking the same actions in regard to Palestine, and America approves of Israel's policies. We should not listen to their opinion and instead do all that we can to protect the citizens of our

country.”

In January 2006, President Lukashenko granted a medal to an antisemitic ideologue, according to a January 6, 2006 report by the opposition news site Kharitiya 97. President Lukashenko reportedly awarded Eduard Skobelev a prize for “spiritual development” despite complaints by Jewish activists in 2005 that his book “Stalin’s Testament” contains personal attacks against Belarusian Jewish leaders. Mr. Skobelev is a prominent member of the presidential administration who edits its official newsletter, and has a long reputation for promoting antisemitism. In 1990, he reportedly proposed mass murder as a means to solve the “Jewish problem” and more recently, he argued that infamous antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a genuine document. In December 2005, another long-time presidential aide, Viktor Kuchinsky, reportedly called for the violent expulsion of all migrants from the Caucasus.

Belarus is alone among former Soviet republics in arbitrarily blocking the distribution of matzo by synagogues for supposed bureaucratic infractions. In the days before April 2000 Passover festivities, employees of the Frunze inter-regional tax inspectorate stopped Minsk synagogues’ distribution of matzo because the Jewish community supposedly failed to comply with “appropriate regulations for sale.” In fact, the matzo is distributed free of charge to the Jewish community.

In March 2006, Minsk officials impeded Passover celebrations by denying a local Jewish community permission to gather for prayer, according to an April 18, 2006 report by the AEN news agency. Vladimir Malinkin, chairman of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, told AEN that his community does not have a fully functioning synagogue, and is therefore forced to rent public spaces in the city for major holiday celebrations. Two weeks before Passover, the community applied for permission to the city's central district administration and reached an oral agreement with the director of a local Youth Palace to hold the event there. The district administration refused to grant a permit, despite the fact that the community had held services there in the past. The community leadership then scrambled to apply for permission to hold Passover events in the dining hall of the House of Journalists. This was also denied--a mere three hours before Passover began.

The community leadership then asked the Jewish Religious Community, which has a functioning synagogue, for permission to worship with them, which was granted. However, this smaller space resulted in much fewer worshipers gathering than planned. Reflecting the high level of intimidation prevalent within the local Jewish community, Mr. Malinkin cautiously characterized the bureaucratic problems as “bordering on antisemitism” and recalled a similar incident in the recent past, during which community members worshiped inside the Israeli embassy after being denied permits for other public spaces.

Aside from a small number of low-circulation independent newspapers and web sites, the media is totally controlled by the government. In May 2002, both Yakov Basin and the liberal weekly Russian newspaper *Moskovskie Novosti* reported that the Belarusian government had appointed a group of infamous antisemites to replace editors at several of the country’s literary magazines. Belarusian member of parliament and close ally of President Lukashenko Sergey Kostyan was appointed head of a newly created government media holding company set up to supervise all literary magazines. Antisemitic writer Eduard Skobelev was appointed by the Belarusian

government as Mr. Kostyan's deputy. At a meeting with the staff of the magazine *Neman*, both men allegedly accused employees of "kissing the asses of the kike-masons." Nina Chaika, former host of an antisemitic show on state-run radio that once broadcast a program based on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, vowed to drive the "spirit of Zionism" out of a literary magazine she was appointed to run. Another magazine (*Krynitsa*) is now headed by Vyasheslav Dashkevich, who reportedly contributes articles "unmasking Zionists" to the antisemitic newspaper *Slavyansky Nabat*.

In a country where most of the economy, media, and cultural activities is under centralized state control, there is not a single independent Jewish newspaper, not a single Jewish school providing general education, and not a single Jewish cultural institution (theater, library, museum or concert group, etc) financed by the state. For the Jewish national minority there is not a single minute of radio or TV broadcasting, nor is there any publishing activity. The long and rich history of Jews of Belarus and the Holocaust are blatantly ignored in academic literature. In Minsk, Mogilev, Brest, and Borisov, the issue of restitution of buildings to the Jewish communities, which were built using the money of the Jewish people and then confiscated by the Soviet regime, remains unresolved. Jewish NGOs and religious organizations in these towns have to rent premises for their activities.

There is an open merging of state power and the Russian Orthodox Church in order to monopolize the spiritual life of the country under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox culture. This sometimes leads to discrimination in different forms against other confessions and denominations. This is especially true of Protestants, who some local authorities have tried to stifle through spurious legal and extra-legal measures. The registration of some Protestant congregations has been denied, foreign priests are at times deprived of visas, and the priests and administrators of targeted communities are fined for holding services in unregistered communities or in premises that are not attributed to be used as places of worship. Some Protestants and Catholics resorted to hunger strikes this year to protest against the illegal actions of officials.

III. The Response of Religious Freedom and Human Rights NGOs.

No serious policymaker would contemplate with relish a return to the Cold War. However, it would be naïve not to recognize that: (i) the KGB and its post-Soviet successor agencies, incomparable at intelligence and propaganda, have always considered its top enemies or targets to be the United States and NATO, and continue to do so today; (ii) veteran intelligence and military officers, under President Putin, dominate Russia's political and foreign policy leadership; and (iii) increasing anti-American, anti-Israel and, to a lesser extent, anti-Europe propaganda--which the government-controlled media in Russia portray as being in a dangerous, anti-Russian conspiracy--is an important tool by which the Kremlin is successfully securing authoritarian rule. The corruption and dysfunction of the government and the courts further empowers the Kremlin to act without any public accountability.

This is a prescription for a "perfect storm" enabling Russia to thwart the economic and defense initiatives of America and Europe. While much has been written recently about attempts to organize an anti-Putin opposition party or coalition, it is not clear that the respective parties are programmatically compatible and it is clear that they have no short-term hopes for success. This

leaves the human rights NGO community as the principal, independent pro-democracy sector within the three countries.

On February 8, 2007 an unprecedented conference of 75 human rights and religious freedom NGO leaders, called together by UCSJ, the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG) and several other leading human rights NGOs, was held to discuss the negative implications of religious discrimination and, as the conference title indicated, “Hate Speech, Xenophobia and Antisemitism in Russia in the 21st Century.” The meeting addressed the need to complete the planning for mobilizing a domestic and international NGO human rights and religious freedom monitoring and advocacy coalition.

Given the increasingly hostile political atmosphere, the discussion was rather animated because, coincidentally, it commenced one day after Vladimir Putin’s infamous rant against America at the Munich international security conference. Western democracies’ support of these brave and embattled NGOs has therefore become a human rights and civil society imperative.

By summer 2007, UCSJ and MHG had put in place and begun training the international Coalition Against Hate’s blog. This initiative responds to the need to coordinate NGO monitoring and advocacy on the ground, and to support these human rights NGOs, who are both subject to intimidation by the Kremlin and the Belarusian dictatorship and also isolated by a largely apathetic and fearful public. The coalition and its blog will intensify and strengthen the monitoring enterprise in ways that individual NGOs cannot adequately provide.

The role of NGOs and the mobilization of public opinion are vital because most Western governments are hesitant to press Russia on what Russia takes to be political opposition or interference with its internal governance. And yet, the Coalition Against Hate could be seen as an ally inasmuch as Putin himself has publicly inveighed against terrorism, antisemitism and xenophobia, and the corruption and dysfunction of Russia’s criminal justice system. In reality, Putin’s fear and hostility towards domestic and especially foreign NGOs, independent journalists and other truth tellers, and the traditional international mechanisms for airing public and governmental concerns about his domestic governance, such as the Helsinki Process, bespeaks his sense of vulnerability to public approbation.