

Russian Regional Report
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A bi-weekly publication jointly produced by the ISN, a project of the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich) (<http://www.isn.ethz.ch>), and the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) at American University, Washington, DC (<http://www.American.edu/tracc>).

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RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN DISPUTE

NEGOTIATIONS ON AZOV SEA FAIL AGAIN. With most coverage focused on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over natural gas prices at the end of 2005 and beginning of 2006, few noticed the failure of the two countries' 23rd round of negotiations over delimiting the borders of the Azov Sea at the beginning of December. Who controls the Azov and Black sea basin is much more important for both states than the price of energy Russia charges Ukraine. How the maritime border is drawn will affect the distribution and exploitation of natural resources that will significantly affect the development of the two countries' economies over the next decade.

While Ukraine and Russia managed to resolve several second-tier issues, they have not come to a mutually-acceptable resolution of how to define lines of control over the Kerch Strait between the two seas, making all other agreements meaningless. Setting the border in the Kerch Strait will make it possible to determine the rest of the border in the Azov and Black seas.

Many Russian media immediately tied the failure of the border negotiations to the gas conflict. They argued that Kyiv's demands over the border were a further attempt to pressure Russia to provide natural gas at a lower price. However, if there is a connection between the two issues, it is unlikely to be as simple as that, given the importance of the area to both countries.

Ukraine continues to demand that the state border in the strait follow the administrative border that existed between Russia and Ukraine when they were part of the Soviet Union. In that approach is taken, Ukraine would become the monopoly owner of the Kerch Strait. This outcome would effectively turn the Azov Sea into an internal sea for Ukraine, an outcome the Russians refuse to accept. Under this solution, Russian

trading ships would have to pay Ukraine significant sums to transit the Azov Sea to access the Black Sea. Russian fishermen would also suffer significant losses since many of the most fertile sturgeon fishing beds are located on the Ukrainian side of the Azov. Additionally, the Russian military fears that NATO would build a base on the Azov Sea since Ukraine has announced that it wants to become a member of this military alliance.

Moscow proposes leaving most of the water area for joint use, claiming that it is the internal water of two different countries, and defining the border along the shores. Ukraine is opposed to this proposal for more reasons than that it would lose transit fees. The Ukrainian authorities fear that if the sea is left for both sides to exploit, Russian oil companies would quickly move in. Confirmed hydrocarbon deposits on just the Russian side of the Azov and Black sea shelves are about 300 million tons of oil and up to 50 billion cubic meters of gas. Experts claim that the confirmed deposits are only the tip of the iceberg and further exploration will reveal much greater reserves. However, such exploration is not being carried out now thanks to the unresolved territorial dispute. Dividing the sea along the lines Russia proposes would open the Azov shelf to Russian oil companies with whom it would be very difficult for the Ukrainians to compete.

The Russian-Ukrainian border negotiations in the Azov-Black sea basin have been dragging on for many years preventing economic development in both countries. Since fishermen in the area do not have established quotas for catching fish and specific zones for fishing, the door is left open for poachers. Currently, ecologists fear that if fishing continues at the current rate, the local sturgeon population will be wiped out in five years.

At the end of the negotiations in Moscow, the two sides agreed to "avoid unilateral actions." In such a polarized atmosphere, that is likely the only positive result. - Sergei Danilchenko in Krasnodar

REGIONAL POLITICS

NOVOSIBIRSK GOVERNOR BEATS UNITED RUSSIA IN NAMING SPEAKER.

Former First Deputy Governor Aleksei Bespalikov won election as the speaker of the Novosibirsk Oblast Soviet on 23 December in two rounds of voting that demonstrated a strong opposition to him from groups within the United Russia party. The difficult battle over the speakership likely marks the beginning of a continuing stand-off between the governor and the pro-Kremlin party.

The Novosibirsk legislature has 98 seats. In the 11 December elections, United Russia won 41 seats, the Communists took 21, the Agrarians 14, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, 6 and 8 independent deputies united in their own group. (See RRR, 15 December 2005).

Bespalikov's nomination for the post is part of Governor Viktor Tolokonskii's overall effort to increase his power in the region in order to insure that President Vladimir Putin will appoint him to another term, according to the general director of the Sibir'-Forum, Viktor Kozodoi. "In appointing the next governor, the Kremlin will take into account the level of influence of each candidate, including Tolokonskii. Having a member of his team as the speaker of the region's legislature will increase Tolokonskii's chances," he said. The regional legislature must approve the president's appointment of the governor under the new system for choosing regional leaders Putin introduced after

the attack on Beslan in September 2004. So far, no regional parliament has decided to oppose the president's will.

Enormous intrigue surrounds the role of the United Russia party in this contest. On one hand, as the sitting governor, Tolokonskii had to support this party and even became a member of it at the beginning of the elections. On the other hand, the party refused to support Bespalikov in his effort to win a seat in the regional parliament even though he is a member of the party's political council. Accordingly, Bespalikov ran as an independent candidate in one of the region's 49 single-member districts. Moreover, during the elections there were discussions in Novosibirsk political circles of the plans of United Russia and Presidential Envoy Anatolii Kvashnin to replace Tolokonskii. Kvashnin publicly opposed Bespalikov's efforts to secure the speakership.

Initially, United Russia could not determine who it would back for the speaker's post. Among the most prominent candidates was Viktor Ignatov, a young, ambitious politician who is the head of the regional party's campaign staff. At one point, the party sought to return former speaker Viktor Leonov to his post, but Leonov removed his name from consideration under pressure from the governor's administration, which offered him a position in the Federation Council if he agreed to step down.

Finally, the sides agreed to a series of compromises. United Russia would back Bespalikov as speaker in exchange for the ability to appoint the regional legislature's representative to the Federation Council and seven committee chairmen. Additionally, the agreement provided for four deputy speaker slots, one for each of the parties represented in the oblast legislature.

Despite having this agreement in place, election day in oblast legislature brought a surprise: Bespalikov failed to win the speaker's chair in the first round of voting, winning only 48 of the 50 necessary votes (half of the legislature's membership, plus one). Ignatev won 42 votes. After taking a break and further intense discussions, Bespalikov secured victory in the second round with 57 votes. The rest of the members of the slate that had been determined in advance were also elected to their respective posts.

Local observers see this vote as only the beginning of a deeper confrontation between United Russia and the governor. "There is a real opposition in the Oblast Soviet. Its members are relatively young, energetic business people who want to redistribute influence in the region. They have great ambitions and interests, and control extensive financial and informational resources, but now lack access to the real levers of power," according to Kozodoi.

Political Scientist Aleksei Mazur predicts that there will be a chill in relations between Governor Tolokonskii and the presidential envoy. The election of Bespalikov as speaker demonstrates the governor's control over the regional legislature and shows that Tolokonskii is ready to fight for the post of governor, he noted. "After the introduction of the system of appointing governors, the Kremlin's worst nightmare is the possibility of a conflict with a regional parliament. Before introducing its candidate, the Kremlin seeks to be sure that the regional parliament will not risk having the Kremlin disband it in support of the old governor. Nobody wants open conflict. The Novosibirsk Oblast Council has demonstratively ignored the opinion of the presidential envoy." - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

HUMAN RIGHTS

MORDOVIA CREATES OMBUDSMAN POST, WHICH REMAINS VACANT.

The Republic of Mordovia's parliament has established the post of human rights ombudsman, which will have the task of protecting civil and political rights in the region. The ombudsman will be appointed for a term of five years and will not be subordinate to any state organ or official.

While the federal government and many regions have established such posts, its appearance in Mordovia is somewhat paradoxical because the republic's leadership under President Nikolai Merkushkin permits no outside interference into its activities. The republic has a strict system in which all power is centralized. Merkushkin controls all political, economic, social, and legal issues. Several years ago he defined his ruling philosophy in three words: Agreement, Order, Creation. All forms of disagreement are discouraged.

Since a human rights ombudsman could not accept such conditions on principle, why did the republican authorities bother to create the post? There are several explanations. First of all, part the move is an attempt to improve the republic's image. Second, simply creating the post of the ombudsman does not mean that the authorities are actually going to appoint a specific person to serve in this role.

Examples of institutions without concrete people to actually work in them already exist in Mordovia. The Accounting Chamber is the most obvious. Three years ago Mordovia adopted a law on the Chamber which defined the functions of its leader and auditors and even their salaries. Nevertheless, the Chamber still is not functioning in the republic. The explanation is the same as regards the ombudsman: the regional authorities do not want any kind of oversight from outside, even under conditions when the Chamber would be totally under the control of the republican authorities. The post of the ombudsman also could not be filled -- the republican law does not define when this institution should start functioning.

If there will in fact be an ombudsman, there are several possible candidacies for the post. The republican law is written almost exactly as the federal law. The president of Mordovia appoints the ombudsman and the legislature confirms him. There is no competition or provisions for appointing alternative candidates. Naturally, President Merkushkin will want to propose someone completely loyal to the authorities who is prepared to close his eyes to violations of civil rights. Perhaps such a person could be a former judge or procurator who had to resign after reaching the age limit in his profession or who, by character, is a person lacking in energy and initiative.

At the same time, there are people in Mordovia actively seeking the post of ombudsman: most prominently, Vasilii Guslyannikov, head of the republican Foundation for Social Defense of the Population. Guslyannikov is a "democratic activist" from the late 1980s and early 1990s, served as president of Mordovia from 1991-1993, and initiated numerous cases defending his honor and integrity from the events of 1993, when the republic's legislature was disbanded. Since he left the presidency, Guslyannikov earned a legal education and now is also the chairman of the board of the Mordovia Republican Human Rights Center. He is also the only resident of Mordovia who has successfully defended a case in the European Court for Human Rights. However, his human rights activity is mainly focused on defending his own personal rights, participating in the projects of Boris Berezovsky's Civil Freedoms Foundation, and

monitoring the situation in Mordovia for the Moscow Helsinki Group. Overall, Guslyannikov currently is not heading any visible human rights activity, rarely intervenes in politics, and is essentially part of the establishment, given his position in the Foundation for Social Defense of the Population. The authorities would see him as an entirely predictable figure and he would be unlikely to step outside the boundaries republican officials would set for the position.

Another individual actively seeking to become ombudsman is Vladimir Gridin, head of the regional branch of the Yabloko party. Gridin is not controlled by the authorities and is fully capable of taking independent decisions that might offend the republic's officials. During the past year, he has organized public protests and events to protect civil rights in the municipal services sector and the extremely poor conditions for inmates in the republic's prison colonies. Without a doubt, Gridin has the taste for human rights work, but mainly in the form of protest meetings. It is not clear how prepared he is for the kind of routine, bureaucratic work involved in being the ombudsman. Gridin is also partly interested the position because the Russian human rights ombudsman is one of Yabloko's former top leaders, Vladimir Lukin. Nevertheless, since Gridin is a public political opponent of the authorities, it is extremely unlikely that they would consider appointing him. - Igor Telin in Saransk

RELIGIOUS ISSUES

BASHKORTOSTANI ORTHODOX OFFICIAL SEEKS TO BLOCK MOSCOW HARE KRISHNAS. In December, the head of the Ufa eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Archbishop Nikon sent an open letter to Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov asking him to block the construction in Moscow of a religious cultural center, which the Russian society of Hare Krishna devotees have sought unsuccessfully to build for several years (<http://www.religare.ru/article23380.htm>). In his appeal, Nikon describes the Krishna devotees as a small and dangerous sect. He made his public appeal just when it seemed that the Moscow authorities were prepared to allow the construction of the Krishna cathedral in the capital.

The appearance of this letter is not surprising. The Russian Orthodox Church has long fought with the so-called "non-traditional" religions in Russia. Legally Orthodoxy, Islam and Judaism are considered "traditional" religions in the country and they have more rights than all other religions. The Orthodox church claims that adherents of the non-traditional religions are proselytizing and seeks a ban on missionary activity in the country. Nikon is well known for his lack of tolerance of these religions. In Ufa, there is an informational center dealing with issues of sects and the occult. Within the framework of this center, secular and church officials coordinate their efforts against non-traditional religions and won, in particular, a ban on the Church of Scientology.

Nikon's letter to Luzhkov was a political act as much as it was a religious one. He is calling on the capital city authorities to be guided not only by secular law, but God's law, placing it higher than the laws of the state. He is warning the authorities to remember about their presumed responsibility before the Orthodox faith to block the spread of alternative religions and frees them from responsibility for violating the constitutional principle of the equality of all faiths, saying that it is not appropriate for Russia. He criticizes the religious and cultural pluralism he says that the Moscow

authorities support, charging that it only leads to sectarianism and contempt for Russian culture and history, and spreads such social problems as debauchery and drug addiction. He calls on the secular authorities to support the position of the Orthodox church as the only civil and patriotic position. Regarding the Krishna adherents, he feels that their religious views insult the majority of the Russian population and their numbers are so small that they only have claim to a church the size of a telephone booth.

The Hare Krishna adherents began pushing the idea of building a new center two years ago when the building they rented was torn down in the process of redeveloping the city. Since then, the 25,000-member organization has had to meet in premises left to them by the builders. According to the Center for the Society of Krishna Conscience (TsOSKR), hundreds of members, both Indian and Russian, huddle here every day without heat, water, or a sewer hookup. On holidays, thousands gather in this place without elementary services.

During these two years, the Moscow authorities named various addresses where the new building could be located. However, they never actually made a decision that would allow construction to proceed. In the fall of 2005, when Indian speaker Manohar Joshi expressed his wish to see the church built during his visit to Moscow, the authorities took the decision to proceed. However, this decision was quickly overturned because some of its provisions formally violated federal law. Later First Deputy Mayor Vladimir Resin expressed doubts that the group would ever be able to build a center in Moscow.

Since the Russian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the authorities cannot prevent the Hare Krishna believers from building their church. However, in practice, they can block progress indefinitely through various administrative procedures. The group has already reduced the size and scope of its construction plans three times, but the authorities refuse to approve them. According to TsOSKR President Vadim Tuneev, the group is losing hope that they will be able to build their church. He charges that the authorities are using all available pretexts to block construction. The group's letter to Russian Orthodox church leader Aleksei II, asking if he supported Nikon's letter, has gone unanswered. Chairman of the TsOSKR Executive Committee Sergei Zuev claims that cooperating with the Krishna supporters would help develop religious and cultural tolerance among Russians, something of interest to members of all confessions. - Igor Rabinovich in Ufa

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HIGH TECH BUSINESS

AMERICAN SUES FORMER PARTNERS IN NOVOSOFT. At the end of December in Novosibirsk, the court began hearing the case against Vladimir Vashchenko, the former general director of the large information technology company Novosoft, Inc. Vashchenko is facing charges of abusing his position and transferring shares from Novosoft, Inc., where he was only a manager, to his own company, called OOO Novosoft. His American partner Philip Brennan feels that Vashchenko deceived him, but has not given up on the idea of working with Russian programmers.

Novosoft began producing software in the early 1990s. At that time, Novosibirsk's Akademgorodok, the collection of educational establishments and research institutes in a forested area outside of the city, had fallen on hard times, slipping from a once favored island of privilege in the Soviet era to a depressed zone. The military orders and state financing from the past ended and the institutes had to find ways to fund themselves.

Only the computer programmers who developed ties with western customers were thriving. Working off-shore, they supplied software to corporations based in the west. The idea was simple -- why travel to the west if life in Russia was much cheaper and programming was a profession that one could pursue at great distance. Akademgorodok came to be the "Silicone Taiga," Siberia's answer to California's Silicone Valley.

American businessman Brennan was one of the first to see the possibilities of working with the young scholars of Akademgorodok. In 1992, he wrote a letter to the

Institute of Mathematics with an offer to cooperate. Vashchenko responded to his proposal.

Brennan registered his firm in Texas and owned a 100 percent stake. In Novosibirsk, he opened a branch of the company, with Vashchenko as director. At first, the Russian part of the company occupied just a few rooms in the institute. The programmers were not legally registered and did not pay any taxes. They also did not keep any books. Vashchenko personally paid their salaries, receiving money through Brennan's credit card. In exchange, they sent software to their American partner.

Having an American founder helped distinguish Novosoft from other Novosibirsk firms since many western companies were not willing to risk setting up business with Russian programmers. Brennan, however, was able to win the customers' trust.

Over time, Novosoft became one of Russia's five largest software firms, employing as many as 700 programmers. The company even began to build three office buildings in Akademgorodok and provided scholarships for 66 students to study at Novosibirsk State University on the condition that they come to work for the company after graduation. The scholarships cost the firm \$1,300 for each student. Novosoft also invested in two dozen elite apartments for the firm's top managers.

Vashchenko eventually began to pursue more ambitious projects. For example, he planned to build an entire village for programmers in the Altai Republic, allowing them to live in a beautiful remote location and focus on their work. Another idea was to set up an institute in Akademgorodok devoted to programming that would rival the area's most prestigious centers, such as the Mathematics Institute and the Nuclear Physics Institute.

According to the investigators, relations between Vashchenko and Brennan fell apart in 2001. Demand for Novosoft's software in the US began to decline and Vashchenko began to actively seek orders in Russia, upsetting Brennan. Moreover, according to the investigators, Vashchenko decided that he did not need Brennan. He allegedly moved some of the shares into his own company, upsetting many of his own employees. Brennan sent Vashchenko's subordinates a letter with an offer to work directly for him.

Eventually, the company split. Some of the managers decided to work for Brennan, about a quarter stayed with Vashchenko, and others found jobs with different companies taking their clients with them. Brennan's new partners, Anton Zaruev, Ivan Lisitsyn, and the new director Ivan Ilnitskii, filed a suit against Vashchenko.

The procurator filed criminal charges against Vashchenko on 18 November 2003 for abusing his position and appropriating property. The case focused on Vashchenko's company taking over Novosoft's office, property, and software. Ilnitskii claimed that Vashchenko's company owed Novosoft, Inc. 40 million rubles.

During the investigation, the Department for Combating Economic Crimes confiscated property from OOO Novosoft over the course of three days, taking more than 140 computers, servers, air conditioners, printers, and even telephones.

According to Vashchenko's lawyer Sergei Nikolaev, Vashchenko denies all the charges against him. Nikolaev also claims that all the property confiscated during the search has disappeared without a trace. Moreover, Vashchenko accused his former subordinates of stealing software and charged that the law enforcement officers were trying to extort money from Novosoft.

Ilitskii said that the remaining employees of Novosoft, Inc. are now working under a new brand name OOO Fortress. The old Novosoft name is now too compromised to attract customers. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

ETHNIC CONFLICT AND MERGING REGIONS

SLAVS, ADYGS FIGHT OVER ADYGEYA'S FUTURE. The Adygeya Union of Slavs' congress, held on 18 December, charged that the ruling Adyg ethnic elite has conducted a policy of discrimination toward the ethnic Russians in the republic for the last 15 years. In response, the republican president's chief of staff accused the Union of "nationalism, chauvinism, and xenophobia." (*Sovetskaya Adygeya*, 22 December)

The Union of Slavs proclaimed that the only way to reduce the discrimination of the Adyg elite against the Russians would be to merge Adygeya into Krasnodar Krai. Currently, the republic of Adygeya is a separate unit within the Russian Federation entirely surrounded by Krasnodar. Presidential Chief of Staff Talii Beretar warned that "calls for liquidating the world's only Adyg autonomy would lead to the most unpredictable consequences." He warned that such consequences could include the "destabilization of the situation in the republic" and placed full blame for this instability on those calling for the merger.

Despite these rising tensions, the Union announced plans to begin collecting signatures in favor of such a merger. These events are partly driven by the approaching elections to the republican legislature, which will be held on 12 March 2006. Candidates are already defining their positions either in favor of merger or against "efforts to incite interethnic enmity."

Tactics employed by both sides are escalating. The Union of Slavs called for a boycott of Republic Day and Adygeya Constitution Day. Beretar, in response, appealed to the law enforcement agencies to investigate the registration documents of the Union of Slavs, charging that "they violate existing law."

Union of Slavs' leader Nina Konovalova cited a number of complaints with the republican leadership in her speech to the 18 December congress. She noted that ethnic Adygs hold a majority of the posts in the republican leadership even though they comprise only 24 percent of the population. Ethnic Russians make up 68 percent. The president, prime minister, chief of staff, and 5 of 8 ministers are ethnic Adygs, Konovalova complained. She also charged that ethnic Russians are underrepresented in the housing ministry, agriculture ministry, culture and press ministry, judicial system, and local educational and research institutes. She claimed that the authorities pursue a discriminatory policy in the sphere of business, resulting in an unfair distribution of property. As one example, she pointed out that of the 80 families that own gas stations, only 8 have non-Adyg names. Many ethnic Russian businessmen, grouped in the Economic Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, are supporting the Union of Slavs.

Against this escalating rhetoric, Moscow has remained silent. The capital only seems capable of merging regions in the few cases where the non-Russian elites are weak, such as in Perm Oblast. In the North Caucasus, the federal government has not pursued the idea of merging regions.

As the experience of Adygeya shows, the Kremlin usually backs down in the face of resistance from a well organized ethnic bureaucracy. Moscow had to remove its

representative to the region, former Federal Inspector Anatolii Odeichuk. He publicly supported the idea of merging Adygeya with Krasnodor, earning the ire of the republican leadership. The republican press has warned the new inspector that his authority in the region will depend on his position regarding this crucial issue.

The Kremlin's failure in merging regions is particularly visible in Karachaevo-Cherkesia, where in the end of December 2005, the republican parliament voted to create an autonomous ethnic Abazin Raion. Rather than merging regions, the Kremlin has effectively had to agree to legitimize the ethnic fragmentation of the republic. Instead of creating an overarching Russian civil-political society, the post-Soviet North Caucasus is instead fostering the separation of its various ethnic groups.

This process is happening as well in Adygeya. The incumbent authorities are unlikely to change current policies to meet the demands of the Union of Slavs any time soon. The Kremlin will not push them because, to secure victory in the upcoming 2007 and 2008 elections, it will need the support of the regional leaders. This practice began under Yeltsin and remains in place today.

Most likely, the permanent conflict between the Union of Slavs and the republican elite will not lead to open Russian-Adyg conflict or violence, though there may be localized outbursts. In day-to-day affairs, relations between the two groups remain relatively friendly. The experience of other North Caucasus republics shows that the ethnic Russians prefer to move to other regions than to enter into open conflict. - Oleg Tsvetkov in Maikop

SHADOW ECONOMY IN THE FAR EAST

GOVERNOR: SALARIES RISING; TAX SERVICE: REVENUE DROPPING. In Primorskii Krai, many people still receive their salaries in cash so that their employers can avoid paying taxes. At the same time, the authorities are claiming to have increased the average salary in the region, though in reality public officials are the main beneficiaries.

Since the beginning of his tenure, Primorskii Krai Governor Sergei Darkin made increasing the salaries of his constituents one of his top priorities. Five years ago, when the population could directly elect the governor, one of his chief campaign slogans was that he would raise the average salary to 6,000 rubles a month (about \$200). This slogan was particularly appealing to the poorest residents of the krai and they formed the core of Darkin's support. Ever since his election, the governor has made two trips a year through the rural areas of the krai and explained his accomplishments to voters. This winter in such meetings, he triumphantly announced that the average salary in Primorskii Krai has risen to 9,000 rubles a month. This statement was surprising to many in the governor's audience since they never even received the initial 6,000 rubles/month he had promised.

Around the time the governor was making his claims, the newspaper of the Primorskii Krai tax inspectorate "Taxes and Fees" published an article by specialists responsible for the unified social tax and taxes paid by individuals that described the real salary problems in the krai. Many workers continue to receive their salaries in cash in envelopes. This is one of the most pressing problems in the krai, according to deputy department head Marina Kuzmina. Thanks to this tax shirking, local budgets are deprived of income because taxes on individuals are directed specifically to them. Additionally,

non-payment of the unified social tax means that there will not be money to cover future pensions. In Russia's federal taxation system, the federal government usually fills its coffers with the taxes easiest to collect, leaving the more difficult ones to the regional and local authorities.

In many ways, the situation has reached a point of absurdity. In rich sectors of the economy like forestry, forest product processing, metal working, and agriculture, managers and workers receive salaries between 3, 230 and 3930 rubles a month, according to official measures. Such income is lower than the subsistence minimum in the krai for 2005, which was set at 4,164 rubles a month. Many self-employed individuals also report income less than the subsistence minimum. There are 47,000 such workers in the region. Both the executive authorities and the procurator are closing their eyes to this problem.

An analysis of the official tax statements submitted by the krai's 33,696 employers showed that 37 percent (12,583) pay less than the subsistence minimum. Moreover, there are thousands of employers who pay their employees less than 1,000 rubles a month.

Of course, such low figures are simply a trick to avoid paying taxes. On the other hand, the governor's announcement that salaries are rising in the krai is true. However, it mainly applies to local bureaucrats, representatives of federal institutions, law enforcement officers, and legislators. The salaries of Primorskii legislators now average around 60,000 to 70,000 rubles a month. In regions like Kamchatka and Chukotka, legislator salaries are as high as 120,000 rubles a month.

The resulting budget deficit - with many avoiding tax payments and public officials commanding large salaries - means that there is no money left to pay the truly deprived sectors of society, doctors and teachers. The tax specialists believe that they could increase tax revenues by 2.4 billion rubles a year simply by increasing all official salaries to the subsistence minimum (4,164 rubles a month). However this is not happening, leading to a greater gap between rich and poor in society and increasing contradictions.

The non-payment of taxes is clear in the tax statistics. During the first 10 months of 2005, the share of individual taxes in the overall budget of the krai was stable at 31.9 percent, higher than in the Far East (30.3 percent) or Russia as a whole (14.3 percent). While this tax held steady, however, the unified social tax and pension fund payments dropped by 8 percent in the krai compared to the same period in 2004 and also were lower than the comparable figures for the Far East and Russia as a whole.

Recently, the regional authorities have begun to express concern about this situation because the federal government is forcing regional governments to pay many regional public officials' salaries. To make tax deadbeats pay up, the regional tax service put together a list of enterprises and individual businessmen who pay less than the subsistence minimum. They have also set up telephone hotlines where individuals can provide information about companies that are not paying their taxes. These lines are well used, as people are calling in to make complaints. However, few are prosecuted for these crimes. So, as usual, the main people to suffer will be the workers who will not have pensions in their old age. - Oleg Ssylka in Vladivostok

RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN GAS CRISIS IN THE BORDER ZONE

KURSK VILLAGES RECEIVE GAS FROM UKRAINE... Five Russian natural gas pipelines cross Kursk Oblast into Ukraine: three carry gas to the European Union and two take it to Ukraine. When Russia shut off the gas supply on 1 January, it did so in the Kursk Oblast city of Sudzha. On new year's day, Russia's three main television networks carried live coverage of the pipe closing from the site. Even though bookmakers took wagers at odds of 3:1 that the gas would be cut off, many did not believe that such a step was possible.

The shutdown presented problems for the villages of Tetkino and Glushkovo, where about 3,000 people live. Thanks to infrastructure built during the Soviet era, these residents receive their gas from Ukraine. They faced the danger that they would lose energy at a time when the temperature was -10 degree Celsius. The Emergencies Ministry announced on 29 December that it was taking special measures to insure that the residents would not be left in the cold. In particular, the ministry brought 300 gasoline-powered electricity generators and electric heaters to the village of Glushkovo. Luckily, there was no emergency: either the Ukrainians forgot to turn off the gas to the two villages or they simply did not want to do it. Thus a small crisis was averted. - Sergei Sarychev in Kursk

...WHILE ROSTOV RESIDENTS BOYCOTT UKRAINIAN GOODS. The Russian-Ukrainian dispute over natural gas prices had consequences for gas consumers in Rostov Oblast as well. Three raions of the oblast on the Ukrainian border receive their gas from a pipeline belonging to the Ukrainian company Naftagaz. Thanks to the crisis and the deteriorating relations between Russia and Ukraine, there was a real threat that more than 50,000 Russian citizens in this area would be left without gas. Fortunately, the crisis was resolved successfully, but if tensions again deteriorate, these raions will again come under pressure.

Between Rostov Oblast and Ukraine there is practically no visible border. Residents of the border zone freely travel between the countries. As the tensions increased, however, the gas crisis started to have an impact on ordinary people. It became more difficult to enter Ukrainian territory even though many residents of the mining areas in Rostov Oblast have long worked in Ukraine and never paid much attention to the border crossings.

Both sides, at the direction of high level officials, began to boycott the goods of the other. In Ukraine, this policy was sanctioned by the national government; in Russia, the instigator was Rostov Governor Vladimir Chub and presidential envoy Dmitrii Kozak helped implement it.

Ironically, this boycott was directed at the eastern regions of Ukraine, home to the very voters who reliably support Viktor Yanukovich's party, Russia's favorite in the Ukrainian political spectrum. Russia particularly hopes to increase support for this party in Ukraine's upcoming March parliamentary elections. However, by boycotting goods from eastern Ukraine, Rostov leaders were undermining Russia's potential influence in the area where Yanukovich's supporters are concentrated. It would have made more sense for the regional leaders not to take unfriendly measures against these voters. Unfortunately, the Russian regional leaders often do not think strategically or in their own long-term interests. - Aleksandr Krasnov in Rostov-na-Donu

RUSSIAN PRISONS

MARIJ EL GROUP VISITS CHUVASHIA'S WOMEN'S PRISONS. On the eve of the new year, representatives of the Marij El human rights group Man and Law visited the women's colony in Kozlovok, Chuvashia, where 18 women from different parts of Marij El are incarcerated. Marij El does not have any women's prisons of its own.

The visit was organized with the support of the branch of the Federal Prisons Service in Marij El and Chuvashia. The human rights defenders observed the conditions under which the women are held, offered legal advice, and discussed the problems of the inmates. They presented books for the prison library and local newspapers from Marij El.

The main problem for the Marij El women incarcerated in Chuvashia is their lack of access to their normal social networks, according to Irina Poduzova, chair of Man and Law. The colony is 200 km from Marij El, so family and friends rarely visit. The women inmates were surprised to have attention from Marij El residents and did not hide their pleasure. In 2006, the group plans to visit two more women's prisons in Chuvashia where Marij El women are held and a boys' facility where minors under the age of 18 are held. - Man and Law in Ioshkar-Ola

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American University and the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center

In a letter to Virginia Governor Robert Brooke, George Washington explained his idea for a great "national university" to be established in the nation's capital city. Washington did not see this university in his lifetime, but approximately one hundred years later, in 1893, Washington's dream was realized when American University (AU) was chartered by an Act of the United States Congress. Through the vision of Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst, the idea of a national university, an idea born with the nation itself, came into being. Today AU is an independent university with more than 11,000 students from all 50 states and nearly 150 foreign countries enrolled in undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and professional degree programs.

The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) is the first center in the United States devoted to teaching, research, training, and policy advice in transnational crime, corruption and terrorism. Originally founded in 1995 with seed money from the MacArthur Foundation and funded by the United States Government and private foundations, TraCCC's basic goal is to better understand the causes and scope of

transnational crime and corruption and to propose well-grounded policy. Much of our work to date has focused on the analysis of transnational crime and corruption in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In achieving our goals, we work with the public, media, law enforcement, policymaking, legislative, judicial, academic and business communities. To undertake this kind of collaborative work, we have partnered with the best scholars and practitioners in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia through multidisciplinary research centers.

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The Center for Security Studies (CSS) was founded in 1986 and specializes in the field of national and international security studies. It undertakes research in the fields of transatlantic relations, US and Russian foreign and security policy, the European security architecture, and Swiss domestic and foreign policy. The CSS runs a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army. It also offers specialized courses to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students and is actively involved in the development of new study programs.

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The CSS further runs the Comprehensive Risk Analysis and Management Network (CRN), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP).

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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WAHHABIS OR MUSLIM PROTESTANTS?

LOCAL ISLAMIC ALTERNATIVES IN THE CASPIAN AREA

By Arbakhan Magomedov

After the Beslan tragedy, Russia, like America after 9/11, is suffering from increased fears about Islam. The media generally treat anyone who tries to reduce the tenor of the anti-Islam campaign or seeks to demonstrate some form of pro-Muslim sentiment as a "Wahhabi threat" who is facilitating terrorism.

Similar things are happening in academia. Most scholars today study Islam as if they are examining an opponent: they see a direct line tying the Koran to terrorism. According to this interpretation, evil was laid in the very foundation of Islam. The entire Muslim world is viewed as a dead end that will never be able to modernize. Such scholars rule out extremely important possibilities as alternatives, breaking points, and special cases.

But why is Islam in its new, radical form so attractive to wide masses of people? Why are the Russian regions witnessing a growth in Islamic societies -- jamaats? Do people find an alternative to "Russian democracy" in "Islamic order"? It is not enough to explain this extremism with what sociologists call social problems.

In this article, I will examine the "other Islam," an Islam that lies outside of official Russian institutions and which does not recognize the traditional hierarchy. This version of Islam is growing "from below." It is realized as self-ruling Muslim jamaats, or societies, at the local level. The basic question I address is: what is the character of this form of Islam?

An Islamic Alternative in Astrakhan

To address this question, I will look at the experience of Astrakhan. This region is one of the busiest trading and transportation hubs in Russia's south, supporting all forms of classical and peripheral Islam. Astrakhan is a Eurasian border zone with a future. Observers frequently see Astrakhan as a unique city, a type of Volga Istanbul, in which East and West, Islam and Christianity, exist side by side.

Maybe for these reasons, Astrakhan attracts various peripheral, oppositional, and marginal forms of religiosity. At the end of the twentieth century, the region became a home base for the movement of Islamic renewal. Many of the changes occurred under the influence of Dagestan, center of the most ardent rebirth of Islam in Russia. In fact, the Dagestani Islamic leaders are exporting their version of Islam to Astrakhan, creating a society of radical reformers, incorrectly and unscientifically called Wahhabis. At the head of this society stood a remarkable personality, Anguta Magomedovich Omarov, well known as Aiyub Astrakhanskii. In religious circles, he was famous as a subtle Islamic scholar and one of the best students of Bagautdin Kebedov, the spiritual leader of the Dagestani fundamentalists and one of the founders of the Soviet-era All-Union Islamic Party of Renewal, whose first congress took place in Astrakhan in 1990.

Aiyub comes from the Tsumandin Raion of Dagestan and is an ethnic Avar. In his home in Astrakhan there was a prayer room, equipped with special literature, where he met with people who came to visit and answered religious questions. Members of his society (aiyubovtsy) were involved in retail trade and lived in the Bol'shie Isady microraiion, next to Astrakhan's central market. Aiyub did not like to have contact with the authorities and, as a result, the society lived an isolated life. In the middle of the 1990s, the group engaged in missionary work, which significantly increased its numbers. The new members were not just from the Caucasus, but also included Tatars, Kazakhs, and Russians.

Aiyub and his followers sought a "pure" form of Islam, free of impurities that had built up in recent times. Aiyub expected his followers to bring their external appearance into line with traditional Islamic standards and to follow religious dogmas, which many took as a sign of religious radicalism and even extremism. However, this was simply a cultural expression of religiosity, which did not have a political or military subtext.

On one hand, these people respected Russian law and spoke Russian well. On the other, they sought to strictly adhere to Muslim beliefs. They felt at home in Astrakhan and sought to occupy a social space there as true Muslims. By 1994, the jamaat's membership reached about 300 individuals.

As the movement grew, contradictions developed among its members. Toward the end of the 1990s, the group split due to the appearance of many tendencies within it: radical, moderate, and peaceful. The decisive factor in the split of the group was the beginning of the second Chechen war and the military operations of the so-called Wahhabis of the Karamakhi enclave. In this Dagestani village, leaders renounced Russian rule and sought to live by Islamic law. In the fall of 1999, about 200 Aiyub supporters left Astrakhan to fight in Dagestan and Chechnya. The radicals' departure left behind, and strengthened, in Astrakhan a group of about 70 supporters of a peaceful brand of Islam.

The Aiyub society formed from these members did not support the war in Chechnya. In closed meetings in Dagestan, the group denounced the second Chechen war and war in general. "There is no jihad in Chechnya!" and "We reject this war" were their

slogans (Obshchaya gazeta, 19-25 October 2000). For these statements, the Caucasus radicals denounced them and sought to exclude them from working in the Astrakhan markets. In February 2000, Aiyub was wounded in an attack and his assistant was killed (Volga, 15 February 2000 and Komsomolets Kaspiya, 27 July 2004).

Even though Aiyub and his followers were ostracized by the radicals, the authorities began to label them as Astrakhan Wahhabis and started to exert intense political, religious, and legal pressure on them. The official Islamic leaders in Astrakhan also began to ostracize them. These steps were the result of purely political motivations: the Dagestani authorities and their allies wanted to destroy "radical Islam," particularly after it looked like the federal forces were victorious in the second Chechen war and had destroyed the Karamakhi enclave inside Dagestan.

To this end, the Dagestani authorities and their allies sought to spread the Dagestani law outlawing Wahhabism in Dagestan, adopted in September 1999, to the neighboring regions and to Russia as a whole. A delegation from the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan made this suggestion during a 6 December 1999 visit to Astrakhan. Other Dagestani officials began to accuse the Astrakhan Muslims of being Wahhabis as well.

Aiyub responded by sending letters to the Astrakhan governor on 13 and 18 December 2000 asking that his rights be restored and that officials stop labeling them wahhabis. This was the first time that Aiyub had tried to make contact with the authorities since he had founded his group.

Aiyub's protests had little success and the media continued to portray his group as a bunch of extremists. Stories circulated that they were preparing fighters in mountain camps and readying stockpiles of arms.

All the attention put the Astrakhan authorities in a difficult position. The head of the governor's information department Miron Blier complained, "I have the feeling that someone is profiting from the topic of wahhabis. It is constantly being discussed, not here, but in Moscow. Several times people have said to me 'Wahhabis are wandering around on your streets, why don't you do something?' However in Astrakhan there are representatives of 170 different ethnic groups and all possible religions and there has not been ethnic or religious conflict." He described the type of Islam in Astrakhan as "Islamic Protestantism," since its adherents do not violate Russian laws. According to Blier, "all 'wahhabis' trade at the Kirov market, it is a form of merchants' guild, defending the interests of its members." The oblast's mufti Nazymbek-khzyrat confirmed this view of Aiyub's group. However, the Moscow-based analysts of Islam, from V. Bobrovnikov and A. Malashenko to the human rights defenders of the Moscow Helsinki group continue to label Aiyub as a "radical wahhabi."

Two Forms of Islamic Alternative

A real Islamic alternative can come from below and organize itself in the form of a jamaat at the local level. Such organizations are much more relevant to Islam than political parties. We have seen two forms of such Islamic societies, in the Karamakhi group, which rejected Russian society, and the Aiyub group, which could exist peacefully within Russian society. The table below compares the characteristics of these two types of local Islamic alternatives in contemporary Russia.

Table 1 Comparison of Two Islamic Alternatives

Karamakhi Society	Astrakhan's Aiyuba
Similarities	
Structure: Self-ruled agricultural Community	Self-ruled urban association
Economy: Agriculture, freight trucking, wholesale and retail trade	Market trading
Social Morality: Fighting drugs, alcoholism, smoking	Fighting drugs, alcoholism, smoking
Differences	
View of Authorities: Critical, as corrupt, particularly Dagestani authorities	Neutral, no public discussion
Relations with authorities: conflict with Dagestani authorities, military	Initially none, then positive
Conflict resolution: military intervention to eliminate jamaat	Dialogue and negotiations with the regional authorities.

The "Islamic protestants" are a normal part of business and daily life in Astrakhan. One Moscow correspondent asked what people in the city thought about the "bearded ones." Generally, no one paid any attention to them: the most common response was that "they have been here a long time and don't bother anyone." Their neighbors appreciate the fact that they are reserved, ascetic, and do not drink, smoke, or use drugs. Such attributes also made the group in Karamakhi popular with many of its neighbors.

Why the Growth in Islamic Radicalism in the New Russia?

What explains the growth of Islamic radicalism in the new Russia? Why have yesterday's collective farmers turned into Muslim activists and leaders of local "Wahhabi" jamaats?

The new Islamic renaissance and various forms of the Islamic alternative are society's answer to the collective stress born of the ideological collapse of the 1980s and 1990s. The consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union were a major blow for a majority of the ethnic and Muslim minorities. While liberal ideologists tried to portray the Soviet Union as a "totalitarian monster," it succeeded in modernizing society, promoting national culture (when even the smallest ethnic groups had the chance to develop a written literature and a national elite), and forming civil self-consciousness. Socialism gave the Muslims and ethnic minorities a contemporary and free education

system, social guarantees, accessible medical care, and also made possible demographic growth and vertical movement up the social ladder. The Muslim peoples, with the exception of the Crimean Tatars, practically did not participate in the national separatist movement during the Perestroika era of Mikhail Gorbachev and did not participate in the break up of the USSR.

In contrast, contemporary Russia has a political system that deprives national and religious minorities of fair representation in the country's political institutions. This situation is the basic source of alienation between the Muslims and the Russian authorities. Thus, for example, for the 13 years since 1992, of 154 ministers appointed by Yeltsin and Putin, only 4 were "ethnic Muslims." The Muslims are not represented in Russian television stations or key media. This lack of representation takes place at a time when the Muslims make up 14 percent of the population with 20 million people in Russia.

The Islamization is a result of the inability of the state to generate a broader national idea and new overarching philosophy. By rewarding the ruling clans in Muslim regions for their short-term political loyalty, the Kremlin antagonized the population of these regions. Putin's new system of appointing governors does not increase his control over political processes, as the growing wave of terrorist acts against the security agencies in the North Caucasus demonstrates. Rather, people at the local level are uniting around the radical avant-garde of Islamic leaders. This is a social answer from below to the corruption of the authorities in the regions and the capital. Islamic self-rule has significant democratic potential. It is based on trust in responsible, active, and sober citizens who created a comfortable situation for themselves at a closed local level. However, the Russian state is working against this form of self-organization.

Contributing to these problems are the reforms in the sphere of education which lead to banal commercialization of academic degrees, inequality in access to educational opportunities, and the creation in society of a cult of money.

Depriving the minority ethnic groups of the chance to move up the social ladder and secure political representation within federal political institutions led to a growth of religiousness as a form of self-defense. Dmitrii Glinskii put it best of all: "Among the Muslims is growing a logical alienation from the system which persistently refuses them the chance to express their collective interests and social recognition at the federal level. It is becoming obvious that the growing asymmetry between their numbers and degree of participation in the ruling sphere is fraught with risk and already today leads to their increasing radicalization."

The growing inequality of society and the loss of moral guides is leading to the growth of protest feelings. The Muslim population is coming under the influence of radical Islamists with their slogans of fighting for justice, an honest leader, and the norms of a pure Islam. This was the logic behind the growth of local Islamic groups in the urban areas of Astrakhan and the Karamakhi zone of Dagestan. The radical Islamic leaders guiding these groups came to power with the idea of establishing Muslim self-rule, shariat law and popular self-defense against the tyranny of the police and the corruption of the authorities. This explains the great mobilizational potential of these local "Islamic alternatives."

Radical Islam is, above all, part of the general Russian political protest. The Islamic jamaats are a version of Muslim local social adaptation and defense. This form of

organization, in the context of the difficult and indeterminate Russian transformation, has managed to survive and show its strength. Therefore it makes sense to view these "Islamic alternatives" through a political lens.

CENTER-PERIPHERY RELATIONS

PUTIN APPOINTS POLICE CHIEF GOVERNOR IN ALTAI REPUBLIC. On 20 January Aleksandr Berdnikov will take office as the governor of the Altai Republic. He served as the police chief in this region from 1993 to 2002. The local elite is worried that the Kremlin wants him to merge his region with the neighboring Altai Krai. Another question surrounding the new leader is whether he will launch an investigation into the affairs of soon to be former governor Mikhail Lapshin, with whom he has long had difficult relations.

Lapshin has created many problems for the Kremlin and the president's envoy in Siberia over the years. The leader of the Agrarian Party, Lapshin won election as governor in January 2001. His campaign enjoyed the support of his influential neighbor, then Altai Krai governor Aleksandr Surikov. Surikov hoped that Lapshin would help him combine the Altai republic and krai into one region as it had been in Soviet days.

However, Lapshin quickly began to enjoy the role of leading the small but proud republic, half of whose population is ethnic Altai. Another 10 percent is made up of Kazakhs. He started his inaugural address in the Altai language, loved to wear the national costume, and even identified himself as Altai on the 2002 census. He made no effort to effect a merger.

Lapshin's relations with the Putin administration were damaged irrevocably after the powerful earthquake of October 2003. Even though significant sums of money were appropriated for rebuilding destroyed villages, the construction work proceeded slowly. Ultimately, the federal authorities filed a criminal case against First Deputy Governor Nikolai Moskalev, accusing him of improperly using the aid money.

The procurator also asked the court to convict Lapshin of dishonestly carrying out his duties, but Lapshin won the case. In the spring of 2005, the republic's legislature tried to impeach Lapshin, but it could not must enough votes.

When Lapshin's term ran out in the fall of 2005, no one expected that he or one of his allies would gain the Kremlin's nod for the governor's post. When presidential envoy Anatolii Kvashnin published a list of five candidates for gubernatorial appointment, Lapshin's name was not on it. Lapshin did not give up, however, and organized public demonstrations and petitions in his favor.

After Putin met with Berdnikov, then serving as federal inspector in Altai Krai, he decided to propose his candidacy to the republican parliament. The 52-year old police general worked his way up from rank-and-file police officer to head of the republic's department. In 2001, with United Russia's support, he ran for the governor's office, competing against Lapshin, but he won only sixth place. After the elections, his relationship with Lapshin deteriorated to the point that he had to leave the republic, becoming the federal inspector in Altai Krai.

News of Berdnikov's appointment provoked some protests in the region. The Altai national organization Ene Til (Mother Earth) sent an open letter to Putin asking him not to appoint Berdnikov as governor. Berdnikov met with the activists and promised

them that he would use his influence to maintain the region in its current independent form and block efforts to merge it with Altai Krai. He also made this promise publicly. As a result, Ene Til canceled its planned demonstration on 22 December, the day the legislature voted to confirm Putin's appointment, with 34 of 36 deputies backing the new governor and only two abstaining.

On that day there was one other protest meeting planned, organized by the journalists of the opposition newspaper Listok. According to editor Sergei Mikhailov, they opposed Berdnikov because he had "discredited himself" when he worked as the chief of police. The journalists also claimed to have public opinion data showing that Berdnikov had the highest negative ratings of any politician in the region. Shortly after the journalists went on to the street, Mikhailov and one other organizer were arrested and their slogans removed. Now the elite in Altai Republic are waiting expectantly to see what the new governor's first moves will be. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

BLACK CAVIAR

RUSSIA HAVING TROUBLE RESPONDING TO BAN ON FISHING. The beginning of the new year brought bad news for gourmands and owners of expensive restaurants around the world: The Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an agency of the United Nations, announced a temporary ban on the trade in black caviar and other products derived from sturgeon caught in open waters (http://www.cites.org/eng/news/press_release.shtml). The ban is part of an attempt to prevent the extinction of these fish. CITES pointed out that the ban was necessary because the countries that participate in the agreement could not agree on export quotas for the caviar. The agency demanded more information and charged that requested quotas were too high in current conditions. The CITES decision effectively makes it illegal to trade in caviar and sturgeon meat in countries that have signed this convention. More than half of the world's black caviar goes to the US and another 35-40 percent goes to the European Union. The response was rapid. By early January, the European Union announced plans to introduce new laws to fight the contraband trade in caviar.

The CITES action seeks to stop the poaching of sturgeon, which has put the fish on the endangered species list. The sturgeon, which give black caviar, live in only two seas: the Black and the Azov and the population of fish in each is dropping rapidly. According to Russia's statistical agency, the five countries bordering the Caspian (Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) in 1990 sold 12,000 tons of caviar on the world market. Ten years later, in 2000, this figure dropped to 470 tons. The countries had to lower their catch each year due to the shrinking population of fish. However, cutting the official quotas had little effect because of the extensive poaching in the area. The amount of illegally caught fish now is 15 times higher than the official quotas in the Caspian, according to CITES. Ecologists have long called the actions of the poachers "biological terrorism."

The CITES decision was nothing new for the countries of the Azov and Caspian region. A similar embargo was in place from 20 July to 31 December 2001. Then the only country that the ban did not apply to was Iran where, according to CITES experts, the government had imposed a strict state monopoly on catching, processing, and selling

sturgeon, which greatly hindered the poachers. Recently, the Iranian model has been gaining popularity in neighboring countries. In Russia, an increasing number of politicians, social organizations, and bureaucrats has been demanding tougher legislation and greater state intervention, including declaring catching sturgeon an exclusive state monopoly. In December 2005, Astrakhan Governor Aleksandr Zhilkin announced that the agriculture ministry had already prepared a presidential decree regulating sturgeon fishing that forbid the sale of caviar and fish at markets. It ordered transferring all sales to stores with the necessary licenses. Moreover, the number of agencies with oversight over the fishing industry would be greatly reduced. A number of current laws would be amended. For example, regulations governing the ability to hand out fishing licenses would be more restrictive. Additionally, the Criminal Code would be strengthened to provide for a five year term for people caught poaching.

How effective such law enforcement measures would be is extremely controversial. Poaching is a long-entrenched and highly profitable form of criminal business. The lowest rung of this structure, the fishermen who catch the sturgeon, have access to high-tech equipment that makes it easy for them to hide from the law enforcement authorities. Usually, they have armed guards, whose weapons are as good as the police's, and are able to fend off any attempts to arrest them. However, the main strength of this criminal business is the corruption of local bureaucrats, who provide various forms of protection in catching the fish, processing the caviar, and transporting it to different regions. The income of the poachers is so high that the "fish mafia" always has enough money to pay bribes. Frequently, this patronage of corrupt bureaucrats is based on clan ties, when all participants of a criminal chain belong to one ethnic group or group of families. This situation makes it practically impossible to combat poaching effectively since the members of the clan are unlikely to provide information about each other. The police are able only to arrest the lowest parts of the chain, the fishermen who actually catch the sturgeon. Accordingly, many observers doubt whether imposing a state monopoly will have much of an impact. More likely, this step would only lead to more corruption -- the introduction of a state monopoly would increase the circle of bureaucrats who could demand a bribe for the illegal transportation and trade of these delicacies.

CITES' moratorium is a temporary measure in place until the exporter countries adopt a joint plan of action. CITES General Secretary Willem Wijnstekers said that the countries must show that their quotas are in line with the current situation and will not deplete the stocks of sturgeon. However, this ban is likely to be in place for a long time. This issue is only one of many dividing Russia and Ukraine and it is not likely that they will be able to come to a consensus soon (see RRR, 9 January 2006). Russian officials have complained that the Ukrainians are dragging out the process of dividing up the fishing grounds because the status quo serves their economic interests. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the best fishing grounds were on the Ukrainian side of the Azov Sea and the processing plants were on the Russian side. Every year Russia spends up to \$5 million in efforts to replenish the sturgeon population and the main beneficiaries are the Ukrainian fishermen. Many populist Russian regional politicians have called for "stopping this ecological charity at the expense of Russian tax payers." Perhaps, thanks to their inability to come to an agreement on these issues, Russia and Ukraine may lose their place in the world market for black caviar. - Sergei Danilchenko in Krasnodar

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Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS)

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zürich, according to its German acronym) was founded by the Swiss government in 1854 as a polytechnic and opened its doors in Zurich in 1855. Until 1969 it was the only national university in Switzerland. Today it is part of the ETH domain, which is made up of the two universities in Zurich and Lausanne (the EPFL) and four national research institutes. ETH Zurich itself comprises 83 institutes and laboratories, 330 professorships, and about 840 lecturers who fulfill teaching obligations and conduct research. A staff of more than 7,500 - 25 percent

of whom are women - work in teaching, research, and administration. ETH Zurich currently has 11,700 registered students.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) was founded in 1986 and specializes in the field of national and international security studies. It undertakes research in the fields of transatlantic relations, US and Russian foreign and security policy, the European security architecture, and Swiss domestic and foreign policy. The CSS runs a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army. It also offers specialized courses to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students and is actively involved in the development of new study programs.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN). The ISN is a central component of Switzerland's peace promotion program and a leading free public service that provides a wide range of high-quality products and resources to encourage the exchange of information among international relations and security professionals worldwide.

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COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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CIVIL SOCIETY

TRAGIC FIRE SPARKS CALLS FOR GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY IN VLADIVOSTOK. Vladivostok residents are still reeling from a tragic office building fire that took the lives of nine women on 16 January. In one of the largest losses of life in recent years, the women died after jumping from the burning building, leaving five young kids without their mothers. Thousands of citizens, including Governor Sergei Darkin and Mayor Vladimir Nikolaev, witnessed the deaths after rushing to the scene of the fire. Neither the Emergencies Ministry, the firemen, nor the police had the appropriate equipment ready to save the women.

In the aftermath of the blaze, various organizations, including Sberbank, whose employees died, and the ministry are hurling accusations at each other and are hiding the truth of what happened. In protest, many people joined a demonstration on 20 January denouncing the failure to publish the procurator's report assessing blame for the incident. At the rally, several hundred people demanded the resignation of Darkin and Nikolaev and demanded that those responsible be identified.

On 25 January several local social groups, including the Primorskii Krai Anti-Corruption Coalition, the human rights organization "Freedom of Choice," and victims of the fire united in a new group called 16 January, spoke out. Coalition Secretary Vitalii Beregovskii said: "The population of Vladivostok does not have full information about what is going on, the reasons for the fire, or why so many people died. We hope to have an objective investigation. It is important to analyze the reasons for what happened. Now many people are saying that the fire fighters do not have enough resources to do their jobs. They have no equipment or other means to save lives. Therefore, we appeal to the leadership of the Emergencies Ministry and the leadership of the Primorskii Krai Fire Department to publish an account outlining the revenues and expenditures of the fire department for the last three years."

The human rights activists also are demanding that the authorities publish an account of the income and expenditures of the voluntary firefighting fund of Primorskii Krai to which krai and city businesses have been contributing in recent years. They also point out that there has not yet been a full account of what happened during the fire itself. The Coalition is demanding that the Emergencies Ministry analyze the effectiveness of its activities in saving people. Freedom of Choice leader Vladimir Litvinov launched a petition on 28 January in which citizens can sign their names to statements with the organizers' demands. Four people have already been arrested, including fire inspectors and employees of the Vladivostok branch of Sberbank. - Oleg Ssylka in Vladivostok

CENTER-PERIPHERY RELATIONS

NEW FAR EAST ENVOY STRESSES CENTRALIZATION. Newly appointed Presidential Envoy to the Far East Kamil Iskhakov recently completed a get acquainted tour of Primorskii Krai, the most problematic and politicized region in his jurisdiction. During his visit, he made clear to local and regional authorities that he plans to work hard in implementing Putin's policy of centralizing authority. In the course of several meetings with legislators and representatives of the governor's office, he criticized the authorities for the krai's weak economic performance, the poverty of the population, and the lack of a real battle with organized crime groups. While Iskhakov mainly stayed in Putin's shadow during recent trips to Magadan and Sakha, in Primorskii Krai, he demonstrated that he was familiar with the political, economic, and criminal situation in the region.

Iskhakov tempered his criticism somewhat by saying that the regional and local leaders' stewardship of the krai was "satisfactory," pointing out that overall gross regional product grew respectably in 2005, as did some sectors of the economy, such as agriculture. However, he was particularly critical of the low birthrate, high mortality rate, low average salaries and pensions, and negative migration flows. The only Far Eastern regions worse off in this regard were the Jewish Autonomous Oblast and Amur Oblast.

The envoy claimed that Primorskii Krai was able to record relatively robust levels of growth recently because its economy had dropped so far in the past. He pointed out that the Krai has rich natural and human resources and criticized the leaders for not creating a freer atmosphere, warning that political and criminal pressures were hindering the development of business and democracy. Iskhakov said that he had a lot of information on corruption in the krai, the merging of the criminal and political worlds,

dishonest elections, the redistribution of property among different groups, and other issues. He claimed that knowing all of this made it difficult for him to sleep.

The Kremlin's influence is increasing in the krai as local leaders prepare for the October 2006 elections to the regional legislature. Currently, the pro-Kremlin United Russia has a simple majority of the 38-seat body and could soon even secure a qualified majority. In the past, the krai legislature had influential, informal deputies' groups such as Primorskii Resurrection and Strategy and Reality. They sometimes were able to force Governor Sergei Darkin to revoke previous decisions and negotiate a compromise. Slowly, however, these deputies have been joining the ranks of United Russia. In December, Resurrection leader Nikolai Morochek joined the party and in January influential businessmen/legislators Vladimir Khmel and Nikolai Morochek signed up. The faction now even includes Union of Right Forces activist Nikolai Morozov.

Seeing the writing on the wall, the five legislators representing the Agrarian Party of Russia in the legislature have also applied to join United Russia. This party currently holds the chairmanship of the important budget and food provision committees and is hoping to hold on to them now and following the elections. United Russia has yet to accept these new applicants however.

On 17 January, the Kremlin announced that the merger of Kamchatka Oblast and the Koryak Autonomous Okrug into Kamchatka Krai will take place on 1 July 2007. Residents of the two regions approved the merger in a referendum in 2005. The charter and laws of the new krai, as well as federal laws, will determine the status of the current Koryak Autonomous Okrug within the krai. The new region's legislature will have 50 seats: 27 elected by party list; 13 by single-member district seats in the current oblast, and 10 elected in a 10-person district on the territory of the former okrug. Current Kamchatka Governor Mikhail Mashkovtsev did not attend the meeting in the Kremlin and has already accepted the fact that Putin is not going to appoint him as the governor of the new krai. That post will likely go to the current Koryak governor, Oleg Kozhemyako.

Iskhakov denied that he had once proposed uniting Khabarovsk and Primorskii kraises, saying only that such a merger was possible and that it would depend on the will of the people. He said that he had no specific policy on this question and no orders from the president. A more likely merger to take place would be between Khabarovsk Krai and the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. - Oleg Ssylka in Vladivostok

SMALL BUSINESS

KOMI ENTREPRENEURS CONFRONT BUREAUCRATS, POLICE, CRIMINALS. The topic of developing small and medium business is now fashionable for politicians seeking a reputation as modern managers. Komi Governor Vladimir Torlopov made a point of stressing this theme in his recent inaugural address. Nevertheless, the situation for small and medium-sized business in Komi remains difficult and there are no real stimuli being put in place to advance its development.

Almost all of the small and medium sized business today in Komi is under the "roof" of bureaucrats and law enforcement agencies. To conduct business successfully, an entrepreneur must find a powerful bureaucrat or well known representative of the law enforcement agencies to protect him. Then he will not have to face demands from the tax collector, fire department, or the sanitary service. The protection business is practiced

almost openly now in Komi and it is not difficult to figure out who is protecting which business. Former Syktyvkar Mayor Sergei Katunin spoke openly about this problem when he when came into conflict with Governor Torlopov in May 2005.

The federal authorities seem finally to have grown tired of waiting for the local authorities to adopt decisive measures in removing barriers for the development of small and medium sized business. Local authorities are reluctant to take this kind of action because they would essentially be voluntarily giving up a key source of income. To force their hand, the Russian general procurator issued an order in August 2005 requiring regional procurators to provide more oversight in the implementation of laws defending the rights of small and medium sized businessmen. In accordance with this order, the Komi procurator created a working group to constantly defend the rights of the entrepreneurs. First deputy procurator Nikolai Basmanov laid out the results of the first month of this group's operation on 24 January.

Basmanov said that investigators found evidence that criminal groups, bureaucrats, and policemen were extracting bribes from the businesses and have filed several criminal cases. An official in Ukhta, the republic's second largest city, now faces charges for soliciting a bribe of \$25,000 from an entrepreneur seeking to rent municipal property. Also facing charges is the head of a correctional facility who sought 50,000 rubles from a businessman. Procurators in Ukha and Vorkuta filed charges against an investigator at the Komi Interior Ministry and a former member of the tax police seeking bribes in return for stopping an investigation against several businessmen. The commission found evidence that police in almost every city of the republic had sought bribes.

Criminals are also exerting pressure on the small business community. Ukhta authorities are prosecuting a case against an organized crime group which extorted a significant sum from businessmen to support their colleagues who are currently in prison. The criminals did not stop at threats and even burned the car of one businessman to frighten him and others (*Molodezh' severa*, 26 January).

Unfortunately, in his talk, Basmanov did not give an overall analysis of the protection system and the role of the authorities in keeping this system going. On the same day that Basmanov spoke, arsonists burned the Orion store in the city of Usinsk, presumably because the owners refused to pay the extortionists. The store had faced an earlier attack in August. In February 2004, another store had been torched. Several other cities in the republic, including the capital Syktyvkar have faced such incidents.

Given this pressure from the authorities and the criminal world, in recent years small business has made little progress in Komi. Perhaps the situation will change now under pressure from the federal authorities. However, there is no real plan for business development, even though there is much more money available for this goal in 2006 than in the past. Unfortunately, the Komi authorities do not realize that the most important thing now is not more money for support of small business, but putting in place conditions for this business to grow on its own. - Yuri Shabaev in Syktyvkar

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FEDERAL AUTHORITIES CANCEL NEW SAMARA CHARTER. On 16 January, Aleksandr Fedotov, head of the Justice Ministry's office in the Volga Federal District,

canceled the registration of Samara's new city charter, pointing out that it contained violations of federal law. This new charter had replaced direct popular mayoral elections with a new process in which members of the city council would select the mayor from among their members. By canceling the charter, Fedotov opened the door for the city to hold mayoral elections in October 2006.

City Duma Deputy Speaker Vitalii Ilin and 90 percent of the members of the city council continue to speak out against holding the direct elections. Member Alla Demina, for example, pointed out that holding the elections would be expensive for the city budget.

However, Governor Konstantin Titov backed the decision to cancel the charter. He argued that the Justice Ministry was following the lead of the Kremlin in taking the step. He claimed that the new charter mainly benefited powerful big business groups in the city. These groups are already well represented in the city council and would use their deputies there to appoint the new mayor.

Samara University Political Scientist Yevgenii Molevich pointed out that incumbent mayor Georgii Limanskii and Governor Titov benefit from retaining the elections because Limanskii will likely win another term. If a new mayor came to office, he would likely redistribute property away from current owners to his allies. Thus, the battle is less about democracy than which side will be able to set the rules of the game to its benefit. - Sergei Khazov in Samara

ETHNIC POLITICS

KARACHAEVO-CHERKESIA CREATES AREA FOR ABAZIN. At the end of 2005, the parliament of Karachaevo-Cherkesia passed a resolution creating an Abazin Raion. The new administrative unit includes five villages whose majority population is Abazin. This case is the first example in post-Soviet Russia in which a new territorial unit was created on an ethnic basis.

The Abazin example could inspire dozens of other ethnic groups to seek similar treatment. Moreover, having secured this victory, the Abazin could seek to increase or strengthen their ethnic status and thereby limit the "intervention" of "other" ethnic groups into their affairs and gain preferences for access to financial, administrative, and other resources on "their" territory.

Currently, however, the Abazin Raion exists only on paper. The five villages (or auls as they are called in the North Caucasus), which will make up the new raion will remain in their current raions until 1 January 2009. The parliament created a three year "transition period" in order to rebuild the raion capital and create the necessary infrastructure. Obviously, however, this work could be carried out in a matter of months rather than years.

Most likely, the parliament extended the transition period for three years in order to put off the issue until a future time when there will be a new president in Russia and Karachaevo-Cherkesia. Republican president Mustafa Batdyev's term is up in 2007 and Russia will have presidential elections in 2008. Since the current leaders are not likely to remain in office, they are simply passing this problem to their successors. The practice of postponing difficult reforms is becoming more common in Russia. Last year, for

example, Putin postponed local government reform until after the 2007 and 2008 electoral cycle.

The precedent of creating an Abazin Raion is also interesting in that it makes clear the real distribution of power between the important republican players, the ethnic parties. Observers have noted that the Abazin typically form a united front with the Cherkes, presumably because they are both part of the Adygo-Abkhaz language group. However, the establishment of a purely Abazin area casts doubt on the strength of the unity between the two groups, particularly since Abazin villages from the Cherkes-majority Khabez Raion will be part of the new administrative unit.

The Abazin began to stress their particular interests in the early 1990s. Then Vladimir Tugov, a famous Abazin scholar published an article in the central press arguing that Karachaevo-Cherkesia was created to serve the interests of the Karachai and the Cherkes, and not for the Abazin. Any alliance between the Cherkes and the Abazin is based on a calculation of mutual interests rather than long-term affinity.

The radicalization of the demands of the Abazin also had a purely situational start: It began when the Abazin village of Kubin was deprived of revenue from relatively wealthy tax payers among local industrial and agricultural enterprises. In the summer of 2004, there was a change in the boundary between the village of Kubin and the city of Ust' Dzheguta, whose population is mostly ethnic Karachai. Ust' Dzheguta received approximately 600 hectares of land, which had previously belonged to Kubin. The most important enterprise is the Southern heat-generating plant. It provides 8 million rubles (about \$300,000) a year to the local budget. The Abazin tried to protest the new border, but on 22 June 2005, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that their claim was without merit. Unhappy with the decision, the Abazin rioted in the republican capital of Cherkessk on 29 June. They also blocked one of the central roads. Passions only cooled when the federal and republican authorities agreed to give them their own raion.

Now the authorities have followed through on this promise, though with a transition period. The official government newspaper *Rossiiskaya gazeta* commemorated the event with an article entitled "The Dreams of a Small People Have Come True." However, it remains to be seen what would happen if Russia's approximately 200 different ethnic groups started seeking their own territory. - Oleg Tsvetkov in Cherkessk

HUMAN RIGHTS

MARI EL GROUP COMPLAINS ABOUT PROCURATOR'S INACTION. On 12 January, the Marii El human rights group Man and Law and the interregional association AGORA sent a formal complaint to Marii El Procurator Georgii Mikhoparkin, expressing concern that the procurator of Yoshkar-Ola was not implementing court decisions against policemen who had violated the rights of citizens in carrying out their duties. The two groups just completed an analysis of the city procurator's actions in dealing with court cases against policemen and determined that employees of the city and republican procurators' office were ignoring court orders, leading to the systematic violation of citizens' constitutional rights.

"We must recognize that a key part of the law is the implementation of legal decisions," Man and Law co-chairman Sergei Poduzov said. He described the procurator's unwillingness to implement the decisions a violation of the law. In effect,

citizens whose rights have already been violated by policemen next face a violation of their rights by the procurator. Citizens must first deal with the inactivity in the procurator's office, which is supposed to oversee the police, before they can hope to end police abuses.

The Russian Constitutional Court has ruled that procurators can be held legally responsible for their failure to carry out a court decision and can be punished through an appeal to a higher-level procurator or the court. Unfortunately, so far citizen attempts to achieve these goals have not led to the desired result. - Man and Law in Yoshkar-Ola

ANTI-SEMITISM IN RUSSIA

COPYCAT ATTACK ON ROSTOV SYNAGOGUE. Two days after the 11 January attack on a Moscow synagogue, an 18-year-old man attempted a similar attack in Rostov-na-Donu. There were no injuries.

Shouting pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic slogans, the young man, armed with a broken fragment of a bottle, entered the synagogue and demanded a meeting with the rabbi. When the rabbi refused to meet through a phone conversation, he sought to attack the people in the building. However, the guard summoned the police and the attacker was arrested.

Even though the attacker did not hide the hate crime basis of his attack, he was only charged with hooliganism and given five days administrative detention, according to the head of the Rostov police press service Aleksei Polyanskii (<http://www.urbc.ru/newnews.asp?ida=116498>). During his questioning, the attacker said that he was inspired to act by the earlier attack in Moscow.

Among regional officials, only presidential envoy Dmitrii Kozak spoke out, calling for further measures against the spread of Nazism. Rostov's officials did not immediately make statements. Additionally, the leadership of the local police and Federal Security Service said that there were no Nazi organizations in the oblast.

Regardless of these statements, Rostov Oblast and its capital Rostov-na-Donu has a big problem with extremist Russian nationalist groups. Most of these organizations are relatively small, usually with a few dozen members, though in extraordinary cases, the groups can number in the hundreds. In Rostov, it is possible to buy a wide variety of extremist or anti-Semitic literature. The police and special services generally provide cover for these groups because they see them as a way to keep some form of control over the Caucasus and Central Asian diasporas in the region.

In addition to the ethnic Russian groups, there are extreme group representatives of other ethnic communities, including the Armenian, Azerbaijani, Chechen, Dagestani, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese communities. These groups fight not only with the Russian groups, but among themselves. The Armenians and the Azerbaijanis have come into conflict, while the Chechens fight with the Dagestanis, often resorting to murder. Typically groups of 15-20 individuals attack one or two victims and overpower them. Conflicts among the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean groups, and with the Caucasian groups, are typically motivated by economic reasons, particularly efforts to control local markets.

Frequently, the authorities record this group violence as being committed for prosaic daily life reasons rather than as an expression of ethnic conflict. Often the crimes are not registered at all.

With extensive youth unemployment, the membership of such radical groups is growing rapidly. However, the authorities prefer to look the other way, giving the impression that nothing is happening. - Aleksandr Krasnov in Rostov-na-Donu

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

JOURNALIST WINS CASE IN EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS. The European Court of Human Rights ordered Russia to pay Ulyanovsk businessman Isaac Grinberg 120 euros for material damages and 1,000 euros for court expenses in the first case in which an individual sought to defend his right to express himself. Grinberg gave the entire sum to a local children's hospital.

Grinberg appealed to the court as a journalist rather than a businessman. In September 2002, he published a polemical comment in the newspaper *Gubernia Ulyanovsk*. In this article, he criticized former Governor Vladimir Shamanov and two of his deputies because they initiated a criminal case against *Simbirskie izvestiya* editor Yulia Shelemydova. Shamanov was angered when Shelemydova published an article attributing to him words he did not say and misinterpreted his actions in delaying the adoption of the regional budget. The paper also made up facts about a burned sauna at the elite complex where the governor lived. Shamanov strangely pressed on with the criminal case even though he could have easily won a civil case. Ultimately, the justice of the peace who heard the case sentenced Shelemydova to a year of corrective labor at her workplace and a fee to be paid to the public officials. Ultimately, the sentence was overturned. At the time, Grinberg commented on this criminal case in the following way:

"How can three healthy men, two of whom are generals, including one who is a Hero of Russia, 'fight' with a woman, who is really like a young girl! It makes me think of Shamanov's support for Colonel Budanov, who killed an 18-year-old girl. No shame and no scruples!"

Shamanov sued Grinberg alleging that his honor and dignity had been insulted. In his case, Shamanov interpreted the expression "no shame and no scruples" as information that was not accurate. The Ulyanovsk judge found in Shamanov's favor and ordered Grinberg to pay Shamanov 2,500 rubles and the owner of the newspaper, the Goryachev Foundation, to pay 5,000 rubles. Initially, Shamanov had asked that the fee be set at 300,000 rubles.

After exhausting his appeals in Russia, Grinberg took the case to the European Court. The court finally announced its decision on 21 July 2005. The seven judges of the court, including the Russian judge Anatolii Kovler unanimously decided that Grinberg's right to express his opinion had been violated. This right is protected by article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The court also ruled that the Russian legislation on slander should make a distinction between information and opinion.

After the ruling, Grinberg said that he was "more upset than joyful" about the outcome of the case: "Just to achieve justice, did I really have to appeal to the international court? It is a very simple and obvious question. The Russian court could have dealt with it, but did not want to."

Commenting on the case, Andrei Rikhter, director of the Institute for Problems of Informational Law, told Radio Liberty that in the three years the European court has been deciding cases dealing with Russia, this was the first time that the court addressed article 10, which guarantees the right to express opinions. "The ruling of the European court in the Grinberg case condemns the practice of Russian judges and therefore has gigantic significance. Like Grinberg, I hope that there will be few such decisions against Russia because it is not necessary for citizens to appeal to a international court to protect their rights. If this decision of the European court makes Russian judges adopt more just decisions, that would be excellent." - Sergei Gogin in Ulyanovsk

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Please send all comments and inquiries to Robert Orttung (rorttung@att.net), the editor of the Russian Regional Report.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

KARELIANS DENOUNCE FEDERAL FORESTRY REFORMS

by Tomila Lankina

Among the Putin administration's grand "reform" schemes is a complete overhaul of the way Russia manages its vast forest resources. These changes are embodied in the draft forest code, which the State Duma is now considering (for the text, see http://www.duma.gov.ru/search/kmpage/80200027/zakon/les_kodeks.htm). The proposed legislation has profound environmental, social, economic, and political implications for Russia's regions.

The heavily forested Republic of Karelia provides a good platform for analyzing the pathologies involved in the process of forestry reforms. The new legislation comes against the background of Putin's recentralization efforts during the last five years, in which the regions lost many of the powers that they had hitherto enjoyed. During that period, financial and industrial interests close to the federal government have made great strides in penetrating regional economies.

In January 2006, I conducted a series of interviews with key players in Karelia's forestry sector, such as regional and municipal officials, businessmen, non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, scientists, and activists from one of the indigenous Finno-Ugric ethnic groups, the Vepps. Everyone I met had a negative opinion about the draft code and complained that they had little chance to influence the content of this document.

Over 80 percent of Karelia's territory is covered with forest, 7 percent of which belongs in the highly valued old growth category. During the Cold War, the peculiarity of

Karelia's location on the USSR's border with non-Communist Europe blocked access to forests in the heavily guarded border zone. Accordingly, along the Finno-Russian border Karelia boasts some of the best-preserved boreal forests in Europe. Outside of the border zone, however, the Soviet government set up timber-related industries, which damaged the environment and exhausted the valuable forest resources. Karelia's economic dependence on timber has continued into the post-Soviet period.

Although forests are federally owned, the regions had greater rights to manage and commercially exploit them until 2004, when the federal government passed legislation limiting regional prerogatives in favor of the federal center. In Karelia, over the course of the last decade, the regional authorities pursued a form of "administrative paternalism," encouraging forest enterprises to adopt "socially responsible" business practices in the localities where they operated. Karelian companies also enjoyed the protectionist policies of the regional government. Thus, until recently, Karelia's forestry policies were blamed for discouraging foreign companies from investing there. While consuming large volumes of unprocessed round-wood timber from Karelia, the neighboring Scandinavian states have been reluctant to invest in processing and manufacturing industries, which would help create new jobs for local residents, while diversifying and modernizing the economy. Over the last few years, however, pressures to improve competitiveness among the outdated local industries and address unemployment and related social problems encouraged the regional government to open up somewhat and pursue more foreign investment. The Swedish home decor giant Ikea recently set up operations in Karelia and a Finnish company is planning to set up a furniture plant in the regional capital Petrozavodsk.

Local environmentalists have long worried about how domestic and foreign companies exploit the forest. Another concern is the illegal logging business, which reportedly flourishes in Karelia. However, the various conservation programs sponsored by the Scandinavian governments in Karelia and the presence of an active and largely Western-financed environmental NGO community ensured that environmental norms were gradually being internalized by forestry firms and reflected in regional legislation. The Scandinavian states, European Union, and other Western organizations have spent much more on nature preservation in Karelia than the Russian federal government itself. The local greens like to point out, for example, that it is Greenpeace, and not the Russian federal government, that arranged for and funded an ecology assessment program of national parks in Karelia, and that it is European Union and Finland that sponsored a Karelia Parks development program.

The confusion surrounding the latest federal initiatives will only exacerbate the forestry-related social and economic problems in the region, do little to attract foreign investors, and hamper the efforts of environmentalists to save Karelia's forests. "The management of the forest economy has been completely disrupted. Now everyone is at a loss. Nobody understands what is going to happen next," said Ilya Shegelman, a deputy in Karelia's Legislative Assembly and director of Karelia's Forest Industry Research Center, in describing the successive drafts of the federal government's forest code and the various amendments to the old code produced in recent years.

The code's critics focus on the system for allocating long-term leases of forest plots and their exploitation for non-forestry related purposes. The latest draft code provides for auctions, whereby the sole criterion is the amount of money offered by the

highest bidder. Alternative ways of allocating the land are through the so-called *konkursy*. In a *konkurs*, allocation decisions would be based on a bidder's willingness to take on a set of obligations related to the social, economic, and environmental concerns of the local population. The provisions for non-forestry related exploitation of forest plots are likely the product of lobbying by government bureaucrats and large financial-industrial interests. These rules will allow the use of public access nature zones around urban areas for entertainment centers, parking lots, oil wells, and walled estates for the rich and well connected, like those found in Moscow's exclusive Rublyovka area.

In a rare instance of regional consensus in Karelia, actors as diverse as the governor, local scientists, municipalities, the local chamber of commerce, NGOs, and local forest enterprises have campaigned against auctions and for the *konkursy* system, or at least a mix of both, and for limiting possibilities of access to "Group one" forests, i.e., those around urban zones and along lakes and rivers. The motives of the respective actors vary. The regional authorities and regional business groups close to them may be keen to prevent outsiders from establishing control over the timber industry. Having been deprived of a substantial share of their revenue base--another of Putin's "reforms"--both the regional and municipal authorities also want to ensure that companies obtaining leases for commercial forest exploitation take upon themselves social obligations in the respective localities. The local environmentalists and forestry scholars are horrified at the presumably predatory and exploitative practices of outsiders, whose sole objective would be to exploit the forest plots as much as possible before the lease expires. Finally, the indigenous minority groups, like the public in general, fear that they will be completely marginalized as external bidders deplete forest eco-systems which support such traditional environmentally sustainable activities as gathering berries and mushrooms or fishing.

And yet, as is the case with every major legal and institutional change in Putin's Russia, the voices of these key stakeholders have not been heard in the process of drafting the forest code and other related documents. Legislator Shegelman states that the opinions of the Legislative Assembly were not taken into account: "We were given some fifteen drafts of the code without any consultations and coordination with the regions. We held several sessions . . . where we voiced opposition to the draft. We met, we wrote numerous suggestions. On the first draft code alone, we wrote over seventy comments . . . And then we stopped writing . . . It was all so absurd, the way the whole draft code was concocted."

Andrei Gromtsev, a senior scholar at the Forest Research Institute of the Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, described similar obstacles blocking the involvement of the scientific community: "The scientific organizations were not invited to participate in drafting this code . . . No information was sent to us here, let alone the code itself . . . Moreover, . . . the information about the latest versions of this document reached us third hand . . . At first we tried to be active, to analyze [the drafts], then after about the fifteenth version, we threw up our hands . . . All in all, we counted about twenty versions of the code. And then we stopped counting . . . We were very confused."

Representatives of Karelia's Chamber of Commerce and Industry maintain that they solicited commentary from local enterprises and urged "cardinal change" of the draft code. They then submitted these proposals to the Chamber of Commerce in Moscow with

a view that the proposals would be then considered in the government. Nevertheless, the Chamber's preferred option of a mixed system of *konkursy* and auctions had hitherto not been reflected in the code. "Every law concerning the business community has to be subject to discussion, ideally a public discussion before it goes through any committees of the Duma, Federation Council, or government . . . Unfortunately, this has not been the case with the forest code," complained a Chamber of Commerce official.

When even such powerful players as the regional government and major economic stakeholders do not have a say in the process of drafting the forest code, it is hard to expect the NGO community to have had any major input either. Dmitry Rybakov, an activist of the local Greens Association comments on the Orwellian world of federal decision-making: "The Council of Public Associations of Karelia adopted a special commentary, subsequently forwarded by our [Karelian] legislative assembly to [Duma Speaker] Gryzlov, with signatures of public associations. And yet no one in the State Duma saw it. It's been half a year now. Where did it go? A consultant from the State Duma claimed: 'There has been no commentary from your republic on the Forest Code.' So it is unclear where it all goes or what happens to it."

Activists from among the minority Finno-Ugric communities were likewise frustrated at their powerlessness in influencing the legislation to make it reflect indigenous peoples' concerns in a more meaningful way. While the latest draft code does mention indigenous groups, local observers maintain that it does so in passing, "so as to superficially abide by international norms," but without detailed provisions as to their voice in the management of local resources.

Finally, local governments have also been completely marginalized in the process. "No one asks the opinion of local self-government," maintains Andrey Potsenkovskiy, the popularly elected mayor of Prionezhskiy *rayon* (district), with regard to changes in forestry use. And yet municipalities in particular have every reason to be concerned with the "reforms." A number of Karelia's localities are classic company towns that are heavily dependent on the forest industry. In such localities, the local governments were often instrumental in forcing timber industries to pursue "socially responsible" policies, for which local governments themselves lacked budgets, such as building heating facilities for local homes or providing fuel. The "business first" nature of the new code, they argue, will deprive them of even the limited leverage that they had hitherto enjoyed in the process. According to an official of the local association of municipalities, the latest draft forest code creates "no real incentive for local governments to use their right to influence forest use."

The social aspect of forestry use in settlements has become even more acute against the background of several other federal initiatives. As of 1 January 2006, the new local governments elected and set up in accordance with the 2003 law No. 131 on local self-government started functioning in Karelia. As critics feared, the changes in practice did not lead to either more local democracy or greater local budgets, instead generating property-related conflicts between the various levels of authority. The confusion surrounding changes in forestry management overlaps that of the municipal "reforms," doing little to improve the dire social and economic situation in Karelia's localities.

Post-Script

As I was conducting field research, news kept arriving from Moscow about yet another federal forestry initiative. On New Years' eve, the State Duma adopted an amendment to the old forestry code, this time transferring all forestry management powers to the regional level (available at <http://www.akdi.ru/GD/proekt/097823GD.SHTM>). The amendment is to take effect on 1 January 2007.

The latest act may sound like the regional concerns have been finally taken into account. Barely two weeks later, however, on 18 January 2006 a new amendment was passed in the first of three readings in the Duma (available on <http://www.akdi.ru/GD/proekt/098430GD.SHTM>). According to Article 1.b in this latest amendment, the federal government retains the right to allocate forest plots for lease for purposes other than forestry use. Observers closely following the forestry "reforms" are skeptical as to whether even the other provisions transferring powers to the regions will enter into force as scheduled at the beginning of 2007. Alexey Yeroshenko, the Greenpeace Russia expert on forestry legislation, guesses that knowing the federal government's feverish pendulum-swing changes in the forestry sector, which take place every other month or so, it might well pass the new code before January 2007, annulling the amendments' provisions as to regional prerogatives over forest use.

The December amendment transferring forestry use powers to the regions therefore hardly represents a triumph of democracy in Russia. Most likely, it is one step in the long legislative saga of the acquisition of federal control over vital regional resources, while simultaneously disempowering actors, such as regional governments, municipalities, NGOs, and ethnic minorities, who might oppose such federal advances.

The author is grateful to the World Resources Institute for supporting this research, and to Ludmila Morozova of the Karelian Republican Council of the All-Russian Society for Nature Protection for facilitating research in Karelia.

ORGANIZED CRIME AND CORRUPTION

NOVOSIBIRSK PUTS ALLEGED VICE MAYOR'S ASSASSIN ON TRIAL. The Novosibirsk court has begun the trial against the alleged assassin of Vice Mayor Igor Belyakov. The accused is former army sniper Aleksandr Katalitskii, who allegedly agreed to carry out the murder for 250,000 rubles. The authorities have yet to determine who ordered the hit.

Belyakov was killed on 7 August 2001 as his chauffeur was driving him to work. In the city administration, he was in charge of consumer markets and land relations.

The killing threw Novosibirsk into shock since it was the first murder of a prominent and well known bureaucrat in the city. Before entering public service, Belyakov had a successful career as a businessman. He was one of the first business leaders in the city to purchase a 600 series Mercedes, the expensive car that is popular among the new class of rich Russians. Thanks to preference for fancy vehicles, the vice mayor was often called "vice merc" in political circles.

Unfortunately, several additional contract killings followed the murder of Belyakov in Novosibirsk. In 2002, city council member Anatolii Karpunin was killed, and in 2004, Belyakov's replacement as vice mayor, Valerii Maryasov, was felled.

Widely circulated rumors associated these murders with efforts to assert control over Novosibirsk's Gusinobrod market, the largest wholesale and retail market in the Asia part of Russia. Founded at the end of the 1980s, the market in the 1990s became a central hub for the wholesale and retail trade in clothes and domestic goods, particularly from China, Turkey, and Vietnam. Traders from all over Asian Russia, as well as from the Urals, Central Asia, and Kazakhstan come to the market to purchase good. At the same time, the market became a source of shadow money for numerous criminal groups.

In the early part of this decade, the city authorities decided to impose order on the market. According to a plan drawn up by Belyakov, small sales kiosks owned by private businessmen would be dismantled and replaced by spacious halls, which would belong to the mayor, who would thus be in a better position to monitor the flows of money and goods through the market.

For many years, it seemed as if the authorities would never identify who killed Belyakov. In Russian jargon, such cases are called "visyak." However, in November 2005, the Novosibirsk authorities unexpectedly announced that they had a lead.

According to the investigators, in 2001 Chechen war veteran Katalitskii was facing a personal financial crisis, when an unidentified person approached him and offered to pay for the murder of Belyakov. The order was apparently passed to him by another veteran who served with him in Chechnya, so far only identified as Sergei. The person or people ordering the hit told Katalitskii Belyakov's regular route to work, the tag number of his car, and the place on the road where it would be best to shoot at him. After carrying out the order, Katalitskii received 250,000 rubles and moved to a small city in Tomsk Oblast.

The authorities only found Katalitskii by chance. When he ran out of money, Katalitskii sought to find another assassination assignment through his acquaintances in Tomsk. The presumed customer asked Katalitskii to describe his experience with this kind of work and he related the attack on Belyakov.

Ultimately, the authorities found out about Katalitskii's bragging. They launched an investigation and soon arrested him. He is charged with carrying out a contract killing. He described numerous details about the actual assassination. However, in the trial, Katalitskii is using a different tactic. He claims that he learned the details of the case from the media and that he only talked under police pressure. During his first appearance in court, Katalitskii's lawyer said that the procurator had no direct evidence linking Katalitskii to the murder and that Katalitskii himself was prone to lies and fantasizing. When the court addressed Katalitskii, he said that he could not remember the address of his residence or the details of his service in Chechnya.

So far, the investigators have yet to identify who ordered the murder, the intermediary they used to pass this order to Katalitskii, and the reasons for carrying out the murder. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

RUSSIA, US COOPERATING IN CASE LINKING KRASNODAR, CALIFORNIA. A case in the trafficking of children has gained wide attention in Krasnodor Krai since it represents the first where Russian and American law enforcement agencies are working together closely at the operational level. In a January press

conference, Deputy Russian Procurator General Sergei Fridinskii announced that, in close cooperation with US law enforcement agencies, Russian authorities were able to interrupt the illegal activities of an international group trafficking children.

According to the authorities, citizens of Russia and the US set up the Yunona agency in California with branches in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Guatemala, and a series of other countries. The agency allegedly collected confidential information about orphans in these countries and set up contacts with corrupt local bureaucrats. They then found families interested in adopting the kids. The coordinators of the local representations played the role of intermediaries. They bribed orphanage employees and local authorities to gain information and, when necessary, organized the production of fictitious documents. These services generally cost American families between \$10,000 and \$20,000 for each child adopted, significantly less than the typical costs of American adoption agencies.

Yunona was founded in California by Ivan Zherdev, a Russian emigre from Krasnodar. Before leaving Russia, Zherdev headed the Yunona firm in Krasnodar, which provided translations of documents in foreign languages and foreign language training. After Zherdev immigrated, the Yunona firm in Krasnodar changed its sphere of activities and effectively became a branch of the Yunona adoption agency. This agency attracted wide attention because it was responsible for the adoption of Aleksei Geiko, who was later killed by his American parents. In 2003, Dino and Irma Pavlis from Chicago adopted the 6-year old Aleksei from Eisk, Krasnodar Krai. The couple paid \$11,000 for the adoption. Aleksei died on 19 December 2003. The doctors determined that the cause of death was brain damage and the mother admitted abusing him, eventually receiving 12 years in jail for this crime.

These events shocked both Russian and American society. In Russia, concern about foreign adoptions reached a height when published reports claimed that Aleksei Geiko was the 13th adopted child to be murdered. Many began to call for increased measures to determine the suitability of the adopting parents.

Investigations of the Yunona agency began in the two countries. The Russian authorities conducted an extensive investigation of the conditions surrounding Geiko's adoption. Then the procurators of five raions in Krasnodar Krai filed criminal cases after the appearance in the Internet of confidential information about orphans located in orphanages in these raions. All of these cases were united into one when it became clear that the evidence consistently pointed back to the Krasnodar office of Yunona. Later, on 9 January, the Napa Valley District Attorney filed a civil suit against Yunona and two former employees (http://www.napavalleyregister.com/articles/2006/01/26/news/local/ig_3269981.prt). The authorities closed the Yunona office in Napa and sought damages of more than \$1 million.

The Russian police have now arrested a group of individuals accused of participating in this network, including Zherdev. It is not clear if Zherdev will be deported to the US. He will likely face charges in both countries and apparently decided that he would prefer to face the Russian court instead of the American one. - Sergei Danilchenko in Krasnodar

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In a letter to Virginia Governor Robert Brooke, George Washington explained his idea for a great "national university" to be established in the nation's capital city. Washington did not see this university in his lifetime, but approximately one hundred years later, in 1893, Washington's dream was realized when American University (AU) was chartered by an Act of the United States Congress. Through the vision of Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst, the idea of a national university, an idea born with the nation itself, came into being. Today AU is an independent university with more than 11,000 students from all 50 states and nearly 150 foreign countries enrolled in undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and professional degree programs.

The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) is the first center in the United States devoted to teaching, research, training, and policy advice in transnational crime, corruption and terrorism. Originally founded in 1995 with seed money from the MacArthur Foundation and funded by the United States Government and private foundations, TraCCC's basic goal is to better understand the causes and scope of transnational crime and corruption and to propose well-grounded policy. Much of our work to date has focused on the analysis of transnational crime and corruption in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In achieving our goals, we work with the public, media, law enforcement, policymaking, legislative, judicial, academic and business communities. To undertake this kind of collaborative work, we have partnered with the best scholars and practitioners in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia through multidisciplinary research centers.

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CIVIL SOCIETY

AUTHORITIES, NGOS DISCUSS NEW LAW. Russia's new law on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will come into force on 18 April 2006. The law was rushed through the parliament at the end of 2005 despite extensive criticism from Russian organizations and western observers. President Putin signed the new law on 10 January during the visit of newly elected German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but did not make it public until a week later, thereby saving Merkel the embarrassment of having to address its provisions.

Although the harsh criticism of earlier drafts led to the removal of several egregious features from the law, most independent observers still consider the new NGO legislation to be part of a consistent campaign by the Kremlin to crack down on independent civil society and the expression of opinions that are not sanctioned from above. The new pressure on social organizations follows similar campaigns against the broadcast media, big business, and the regional elite. While the law requires the non-

governmental organizations to be transparent, a necessary feature of any democracy, it also gives wide leeway to state bureaucrats, leading many to wonder if the bureaucrats will use their new oversight powers to close down organizations they do not support.

In effect, the law creates new limits on the establishment of NGOs and new bases for shutting them down. The state registration agency will have greater abilities to exert extensive financial oversight over social groups and there will be particularly strict controls over money coming from foreign sources. The NGOs will have to keep detailed financial records and be able to account for their revenue and expenditures.

On 27 February in Novosibirsk, representatives of the federal registration agency, mayor's office, and several local service organizations met to discuss the impact of the new law in a region far from Moscow. The state representatives outlined some of the new requirements, unwittingly highlighting in these remarks the problems of implementing some of the law's vague provisions. For example, one official warned that if a group did not have clear goals, it would "fall out of the legal sphere" because the state has to worry about the activities of terrorist groups. A representative of the mayor's office argued that the mayor had to know what groups were doing because it often rents them office space and provides financial support. Groups involved in inappropriate activities would necessarily be deprived of their premises.

A major problem that both the authorities and the group representatives highlighted was that the media does not provide much coverage of group activities. Recent content analyses of the press show that the actions of the authorities receive much more attention than do social group events. When the media does focus on social organizations, it is often to report on scandals or changes in leadership. Another problem is that big businesses often set up fictitious NGOs before elections. These groups, which in contrast to more popularly-based NGOs, are well financed, get a lot of attention and then disappear as soon as the elections are over. Some group leaders suggested setting up a joint newspaper that would publish information about group activities, but the NGO representatives agreed that financing for such a publication would have to come from the state since none of the groups had resources for it. Many groups cannot afford offices or telephones, making it hard for them to provide the kind of transparency the law seems to require. One representative of a veteran's service organization said that their energies were devoted to helping former soldiers and that they did not have time to focus on the tasks required for gaining publicity. As the discussions made clear, despite all these problems, there are many individuals donating time to socially-helpful activities.

The group representatives had complaints about state actions and employees. One organizer of neighborhood organizations complained, for example, that there was a very low level of professionalism among employees of the state tax agency and therefore it was difficult to deal with them. Others complained that the actions of the authorities needed to be more transparent to make it possible to establish real partnerships between state agencies and NGOs. Looking at their own capabilities, group representatives admitted that they often did not have extensive experience in group leadership and complained that there were few resources available to improve NGO management skills.

- Robert Orttung in Novosibirsk

GLOBALIZATION

REGIONAL ELITE OPPOSES WTO MEMBERSHIP. Joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) has long been one of the Putin administration's top priorities. However, there is very little support for this idea at the regional level. Rostov Oblast's minister for agricultural affairs Vyacheslav Vasilenko recently spoke out openly against WTO membership. He argued that the WTO would suffocate Russian entrepreneurs and that observing the demand of this organization would be suicide for Russian producers. His logic and conclusions are typical for Russian regional bureaucrats and the businessmen connected to them.

For Russian regional business, the most dangerous aspect of Russian WTO membership would be the cancellation of programs to subsidize local production along with the end of unlimited protectionism for Russian companies and discrimination against foreign firms. The schemes by which Russian regional businesses receive such subsidies are largely opaque and corrupt. Through them, powerful Russian bureaucrats responsible for economic issues earn large profits and they are strongly interested in preserving these profits.

The majority of Russian firms producing consumer products are not competitive and will likely be eliminated when foreign companies have greater access to the regions. Rather than trying to increase the productivity of their work, Russian businessmen have become dependent on the support of the state sector, which simply blocks foreign firms from entering regional markets despite repeated assertions about the need to attract foreign investors.

Rostov Governor Vladimir Chub backed his minister, essentially arguing that whether or not Russia joined the WTO, the regions themselves would decide how to help local businesses. He suggested that even if Russia's national leadership signed these agreements, regional leaders would only implement parts of the agreement which they felt were advantageous, while ignoring the rest.

The regional elite is not in a position to openly oppose Putin's policies even though the governors informed Putin of their distaste for WTO membership at a recent meeting of the State Council. The governors' objections made no impression on Putin. The president is guided by the interests of the largest Russian companies who feel that Russia's lack of membership in the WTO is an obstacle for their further development. These companies make major contributions to the Russian budget and this money is the decisive factor.

Unfortunately, the regional leaders are preparing the worst kind of resistance. While ostensibly welcoming Russia's status in the WTO, they will sabotage the elements of membership that they do not accept, justifying their actions with propaganda about the need to protect the interests of Russian business. The leaders of the regional elite do not intend to dismantle the corrupt systems they have built over time and are not planning to allow greater competition for their companies. - Aleksandr Krasnov in Rostov-na-Donu

POLITICAL PARTIES

SAMARA ADOPTS 7 PERCENT BARRIER FOR REGIONAL LEGISLATURE.

On 31 January, Samara's regional parliament raised the minimum percentage of votes a party must receive to enter the parliament from 4 percent to 7 percent. Representatives of the Union of Right Forces and Yabloko argued for leaving the threshold at 4 percent, but

their arguments were not decisive. Sixteen legislators voted in favor, four opposed the measure and one abstained.

Governor Konstantin Titov backed the legislation, noting that the federal law regulating elections to the State Duma adopted last year raised the minimum threshold for parties from 5 percent to 7 percent. Today in Samara Oblast, there are branches of 34 political parties, according to Viktor Sazonov, chairman of the regional legislature. The number of members in each of these parties varies from 100 to 20,000. Political Scientist Valerii Pavlyukevich predicted that the new law would cut the number of parties from 34 to 15 since the smallest parties will now be forced to form coalitions with larger groups. - Sergei Khazov in Samara

EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS

NOVOSIBIRSK PROSECUTES SECOND GROUP OF SKINHEADS. The city court of Berdsk, Novosibirsk Oblast, has started hearing a case against a group of skinheads, accused of attacking migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The defendants are the second organization of neo-Nazis facing trial in the region. In Novosibirsk, an earlier process against skinheads is entering its third year, focused on a group responsible for killing one Tajik and injuring another dozen guest workers. Both groups were made up of young men from poor areas.

Berdsk is essentially a suburb of Novosibirsk. In the Soviet era it was a relatively large industrial center which produced Vega cassette players, which were popular all over the Soviet Union. During the perestroika era, the majority of Berdsk's factories shut down, after which the city turned into a major headache for the law enforcement and social support agencies. Now, various religious sects and nationalist ideas are popular in the city. There are several musical groups that play songs which espouse skinhead ideology, including "Ghetto," which is famous throughout Siberia.

In these conditions, the appearance of young men who would not only complain about the "dominance of foreigners," but act on their feelings was seemingly inevitable. In the middle of 2005, a group of young men, born between 1984 and 1986, formed in the city, according to the Novosibirsk Oblast police department. They met in a rock cafe, where they drank beer and listened to rock music in line with their philosophy. The men exchanged books with similar ideas, including Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the works of Russian authors with a similar philosophy.

Soon the young people decided to move from words to action. According to the procurator's investigation, on 30 September 2005 about 15 members of the group, armed with sticks, attacked a group of illegal workers from Uzbekistan constructing a sidewalk. The aggressors went after four workers, breaking their ribs and hands, and cracking the skull of one.

On 23 October, after their next meeting, the group beat a Tajik construction worker. They cut him in the back and on the arms eight times with a knife. On the same day, they beat another Tajik with dog collars that they wore around their necks as decorations. Fortunately, the victims all survived their attacks.

In November, the authorities arrested 12 suspects. A search of their homes produced extremist literature, cassettes, and symbols. The suspects did not deny their association with the skinhead gang. The group faces a variety of charges: participating in

an extremist organization, inflicting extreme injuries, torture on the basis of national or racist hatred, and beating. The victims in this case are four Uzbeks and two Tajiks. Additionally, one of the accused admitted that he had sprayed nationalist graffiti on an apartment building and faces charges of vandalism.

This is the second case against a group of skinheads in Novosibirsk Oblast. On 7 October 2003, a case began against eight skinheads from Novosibirsk's Lenin Raion, a poor neighborhood in the city. They also attacked workers at markets and construction sites, using knives and whatever else came to hand. One of the victims, a Tajik who was attacked near a dormitory where illegal immigrants live, died from the wounds inflicted by 18 knife blows. Procurator Valerii Musatkin is demanding sentences of 5 to 10 years of imprisonment. The group leader, Mikhail Rodoshkevich, only 17 at the time he organized the group, was declared mentally unfit and now is receiving treatment.

During the trial about 100 witnesses, neighbors and acquaintances of the accused have given testimony about the formation of the group. The trial process has been slowed by the absence of witnesses from among the victims. After the attack, some of them have returned to their homelands and the court has not been able to find them. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

ISLAM IN RUSSIA

ACCUSATIONS OF EXTREMISM HIDE POWER STRUGGLE IN

ASTRAKHAN. One year ago, on 23 February 2005, Astrakhan Mufti Nazymbek Ilyazov gave an interview to *Komsomolets Kaspiya* in which he called for eradicating wahhabism and extremism in the region. On 9 March, the newspaper *Fakt i kompromat* published an article accusing the prominent local Muslim activist Mansur Shangareev, an opponent of Ilyazov, of precisely these sins. Shangareev was arrested a few days later, on 22 March, and when the authorities searched his house, they claim to have found a hand grenade and drugs. In January 2006, the court sentenced him to three years in prison.

Shortly after his arrest, Shangareev's powerful brother organized a well-funded operation in which several Moscow human rights groups began a campaign to defend Shangareev and Islam in general. Ismagil Shangareev, brother of the arrested Mansur, is the most important Muslim leader in Orenburg Oblast and the director of the Islamic Human Rights Center there. The actions were planned as an attempt to pressure the investigation by influencing public opinion. Several groups organized a round table in Astrakhan on 13 May 2005, though this event met with little success since the locals resented the interference of outsiders into their affairs. Protests took place in Moscow in May and June.

These episodes also reflect the heated battle over control of local mosques between official Muslim structures in Russia. Thus, the mosque where Mansur Shangareev worships falls under the Russian Council of Muftis, headed by Ravil Gainutdin. At the same time, the mufti of Astrakhan Oblast is a representative of the competing Islamic organization, the Central Spiritual Department of Muslims of Russia, under the leadership of Talgat Tadzhuiddin.

In this battle, the Kremlin seems to be taking the side of the Russian Council of Muftis since Ravil Gainutdin is a member of the Russian Civic Chamber, while Talgat Tadzhuiddin is not. The Shangareev brothers, strong supporters of Gainutdin, will

continue using every means possible to win Mansur's release. - Arbakhan Magomedov in Ulyanovsk

RUSSIAN COURTS

ULYANOVSK PROCURATOR OVERSTATES TERRORISM CHARGE. On 31 January, the Ulyanovsk court sentenced members of a group that carried out attacks on truck drivers and then sold their trucks for profit. The case would have been an ordinary example of roadside banditry if the procurator had not connected the criminals to the Jamaat Islamist organization and a well-supplied weapons dealer, giving the whole affair special importance.

Ultimately, the outcome of the case gave the impression that it brought together three incidents that in fact had little to do with each other. Only one figure ties these three cases together: highway bandit leader Sergei Sandrkin was related to someone in the Islamist organization and bought a pistol from another person who stored a large arsenal in his apartment. According to lawyer Iskhak Nabiullin, the state specifically stressed the Islamic factor to give the case more publicity because otherwise it would have been a low profile instance of robbery.

The trial lasted two years and was largely conducted in secret. The oblast procurator described the case as involving "terrorism" although there was nothing related to terrorism in the actual charges. According to the defendants' lawyers, the jury was swayed by public opinion which was shaped by the procurator. In particular, on local television, the procurator charged that the group was preparing an act of terrorism that was prevented, however, there was no evidence of this in the trial.

According to the court's verdict, Sandrkin set up a group of eight people in 2002, including residents of Ulyanovsk, Chuvashia, and Tatarstan. Ethnically the group was made up of Russians, Tatars, and Chuvash. In three separate incidents, the group attacked truck drivers, held them hostage for a short time, and sold their trucks. The members of the group were found guilty of banditry, kidnapping, illegal arms possession, and preparing false documents. The leader of the group received 22 years in jail, while the other members must serve 10-14 years.

According to the prosecution, Sandrkin brought in the radical Islamist group Jamaat, presumably using the religious group for the sole purpose of financial gain. This part of the sentence is the most questionable, since the charges only apply to one member of the group, Valerii Il'mendeev, who was found guilty of inflaming national and religious tension. Il'mendeev did not participate in the attacks on the trucks. According to the sentence, he created a radical organization with 20 members. The court found that Il'mendeev traveled to a variety of cities to recruit new members, but his lawyer argued that he was simply exercising his right to freedom of conscience and freedom to travel.

The procurator charged that a whole library of books on the "fundamentals of Islamist extremist ideology" was confiscated from Il'mendeev's apartment. His lawyer pointed out that these books were freely available in Russian cities and distributed through Russian mosques.

One of the men sentenced was charged with illegally storing and transporting weapons. In his home were two Kalashnikovs, hand grenades, and various other weapons. The procurator made it appear that the Islamic group planned to use these

weapons for criminal means, which is not at all clear from the sentencing in the case. The Russian Supreme Court has agreed to hear an appeal. - Sergei Gogin in Ulyanovsk

ELECTIONS

TYUMEN AUTHORITIES CRACK DOWN ON ELECTORAL COMMISSION.

The Tyumen procurator is preparing a court case against several members of the Tyumen city electoral commission for embezzling funds. The procurator alleges that several employees of the commission, led by the deputy chairman, transferred 1.5 million rubles to a company they controlled during the March 2004 presidential campaign. The money was ostensibly transferred for the preparation and distribution of explanatory campaign material. In fact, this work was performed for free by students at the Tyumen Juridical Institute, where one of the electoral commission members teaches.

The procurator began this investigation in April 2005. Investigators found that several documents had been stamped by a firm registered to people with no official residence or people who had lost their documents. Accordingly, the investigators filed charges for abuse of office, embezzlement, and legalization of property acquired through criminal means.

The work of the electoral commission had attracted wide attention even before the elections because it had disqualified many candidates for the mayor's office and the city Duma who did not belong to the pro-Kremlin party United Russia. In one case a candidate was disqualified for listing his residence as "Tyumen" instead of "Tyumen Oblast." As a result, the only remaining candidates represented United Russia or had no chance of winning. Possibly the electoral commission members thought that the money they allegedly took was payment for their services to the party. The chairman of the electoral commission continues to claim that his subordinates did nothing wrong. - Elena Arbatskaya in Tyumen

ADVERTISEMENT

NATO ADVANCED RESEARCH WORKSHOP ON ANTI-TERRORISM

The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center at American University and the Nizhny Novgorod Linguistic University are pleased to announce that they will hold an Advanced Research Workshop on the topic of **Anti-Terrorist Strategies: Comparing the Experiences of the United States, Great Britain, France, Turkey, and Russia** in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia on May 4-6, 2006.

The idea of this Advanced Research Workshop is to discuss and compare different types of governmental responses to the challenges of mass-scale terrorism. In this general framework, five countries will be placed at the center of research attention: the US, Great Britain, France, Turkey and Russia, each of them being a target of terrorist actions.

Conceptually we assume that the countries directly affected by the "radical evil" of terrorism produce different types of responses. Of course, there is much in common in all five cases to be analyzed, but the most interesting part of the research exercise will be to identify the divergences. Based upon this type of comparative analysis, the workshop

participants will be able to come up with a taxonomy of anti-terrorist policies and strategies and evaluate which are the most effective.

Structurally, the workshop will be divided into six sessions:

-- *Session 1* (to be moderated by the two co-directors) is designed as an introduction to the workshop and its conceptual framework, and will be grounded in major security concepts developed within the multiplicity of anti-terrorist discourses;

-- *Sessions 2-5* will be geographically-based and focus on the experiences of the U.S., Europe, Turkey and Russia in tackling terrorist threats. For each of the cases, we hope to have an overview reflecting the governments' policies and dilemmas. After that, the discussion will be split into three more specific lines: a) legal reaction (new laws passed, decrees introduced, financial measures taken, etc.); b) institutional reactions (new bodies formed within the governmental apparatus, or redistribution of powers undertaken within existing organs, the change in the balance of power among the different branches of government); and c) public policy reactions (changes in political attitudes, electoral repercussions, fluctuations of government's approval ratings, impact on human rights issues, etc.).

-- *Session 6* (to be moderated by co-directors) will draw together and compare the main findings. Its gist and mission will be to offer a common background for understanding the nature of the differences in the various countries' responses to terrorism, and establishing a set of criteria allowing for drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the five cases based upon the multiplicity of the responses.

If you are interested in participating or would like additional information, please contact Robert Orttung (rorttung@att.net) or Andrey Makarychev (amak_nizhny@mail.ru).

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the American University or the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), their staff, or sponsors.

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RUSSIAN REGIONAL REPORT SPONSORS

American University and the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center

In a letter to Virginia Governor Robert Brooke, George Washington explained his idea for a great "national university" to be established in the nation's capital city. Washington did not see this university in his lifetime, but approximately one hundred years later, in 1893, Washington's dream was realized when American University (AU) was chartered by an Act of the United States Congress. Through the vision of Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst, the idea of a national university, an idea born with the nation itself, came

into being. Today AU is an independent university with more than 11,000 students from all 50 states and nearly 150 foreign countries enrolled in undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and professional degree programs.

The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) is the first center in the United States devoted to teaching, research, training, and policy advice in transnational crime, corruption and terrorism. Originally founded in 1995 with seed money from the MacArthur Foundation and funded by the United States Government and private foundations, TraCCC's basic goal is to better understand the causes and scope of transnational crime and corruption and to propose well-grounded policy. Much of our work to date has focused on the analysis of transnational crime and corruption in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In achieving our goals, we work with the public, media, law enforcement, policymaking, legislative, judicial, academic and business communities. To undertake this kind of collaborative work, we have partnered with the best scholars and practitioners in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia through multidisciplinary research centers.

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS)

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zürich, according to its German acronym) was founded by the Swiss government in 1854 as a polytechnic and opened its doors in Zurich in 1855. Until 1969 it was the only national university in Switzerland. Today it is part of the ETH domain, which is made up of the two universities in Zurich and Lausanne (the EPFL) and four national research institutes. ETH Zurich itself comprises 83 institutes and laboratories, 330 professorships, and about 840 lecturers who fulfill teaching obligations and conduct research. A staff of more than 7,500 - 25 percent of whom are women - work in teaching, research, and administration. ETH Zurich currently has 11,700 registered students.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) was founded in 1986 and specializes in the field of national and international security studies. It undertakes research in the fields of transatlantic relations, US and Russian foreign and security policy, the European security architecture, and Swiss domestic and foreign policy. The CSS runs a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army. It also offers specialized courses to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students and is actively involved in the development of new study programs.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN). The ISN is a central component of Switzerland's peace promotion program and a leading free public service that provides a wide range of high-quality products and resources to encourage the exchange of information among international relations and security professionals worldwide.

The CSS further runs the Comprehensive Risk Analysis and Management Network (CRN), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP).

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Please send all comments and inquiries to Robert Ortung (rorttung@att.net), the editor of the Russian Regional Report.

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FAR EASTERN FISHING

POACHING COSTS RUSSIA'S PACIFIC COAST DEARLY. The lack of political will and corruption within the fishing industry make it difficult to combat illegal fishing in the Far East. Most observers agree that Russia has yet to come up with a national policy for the fishing industry. The Far East suffers the most from this problem since it is the main producer of seafood in the country.

Fishing and processing seafood has long been the main occupation of the population and the basis of the economy and the region's tax revenue. Since the mid-1990s, when the fishing industry lost its traditional state subsidies and had to survive in market conditions, it has fallen into criminalization and corruption. For the last 15 years, the shadow economy has dominated a Far East fishing business based on poaching, the purchase of state bureaucrats at all levels, and contacts with foreign business interested in illegal deliveries from Russia of cheap crabs, caviar, and fish.

Recently the Association of Primorskii Krai Fishing Enterprises (ARPP) ordered research into the impact of criminal business on the local economy. The main result of the study was not new: Even though stocks in the northern and north-west part of the Pacific Ocean are dwindling, the economic losses from poaching are continuing to grow. According to official customs statistics from South Korea, Japan, and the USA, and Russian data on allowed catches, the economic losses just from illegal catches of three products - Kamchatka crab, Blue crab, and Mintai - was more than \$750 million a year.

It is no secret that for many years the state has not wanted to, or been able to, do anything about the black market for fish in the Far East. The government has taken a series of half-hearted measures. For example, several years ago, it introduced auctions for

determining fishing quotas. At the beginning of the fishing season, the fishermen had to purchase at market prices quotas allowing them to catch a certain amount of crab and fish. These auctions proved to be ineffective, because the fisherman typically bought minimal amounts of fish at the auctions and caught as much as they wanted.

Now the authorities have returned to the old system: fishing firms with ships who have long worked in the industry divide up free quotas for catching sea creatures. This system makes it possible to collect a small amount of taxes from the fishermen.

Thanks to a lack of effective monitoring, many describe the past year as the richest for Far Eastern fishermen. Growth rates in the industry reached 10 percent and the fishing industry witnessed an investment boom. The large fishing companies have started to change ownership. For example, ownership of TURNIF, which once employed current Vladivostok Mayor Vladimir Nikolaev, and Intraros, recently changed hands. However, few are willing to admit that even as fishermen have started to catch more fish legally, they have also increased their illegal catches. Overall, for the state and law-abiding businessmen, the situation has become worse.

The proportion of crab illegally caught and brought to ports in Japan and the US from Russia in 2005 exceeded 85 percent, with a total cost to Russia of \$300 million, according to the journal *Dal'nevostochnyi kapital*. This statistic suggests that seven of every ten tons of seafood exports are criminal.

Today, many, but not all, Far Eastern fishermen work illegally through two different methods. First is typical poaching, when the fishermen do not have the necessary license or quotas to catch the fish that they catch. A ship without identifying marks simply catches the fish and then, using false documents, goes to a Japanese or Korean port to sell its catch. The second method is more clever: a crew with a license to catch a certain amount of fish, exceeds this limit many times over. Then the ship transfers its catch on the high seas to a foreign ship, which takes it to China, Korea, or Japan. In their accounts for Russian customs and sea inspectors, these fishermen provide one set of figures, while the reality is quite different.

Sometimes the authorities catch poachers. But usually they capture those who do not have high-level protection or those who did not pay a bribe in advance. Sometimes, even foreign ships are caught, but these are usually small Japanese or North Korean craft. The punishment for Russian boats that are caught are minor -- usually a small fine for the owner or suspended sentences for the boat captain. In some circles it is considered very prestigious to be a sea inspector since they often can collect so many bribes in one trip that they do not need to work for long afterwards.

The system of bribes and services has been around for many years allowing the criminal fish bosses to stay in business. During the last two years, there were two cases in Kamchatka that made it clear that the main links in the criminal fishing industry went back to government structures in Moscow and to dealers living beyond Russia's borders. But so far no high-level bureaucrat or businessman has been punished.

Over the last two years, the federal government has examined the problem. President Putin and his ministers have called on Far Eastern specialists in the fish business, such as Primorskii Governor Sergei Darkhin, once the head of one of the largest fishing concerns, and Koryak Governor Oleg Kozhemyak, also a prominent fisherman, to explain how to clean up the industry. Both of these specialists, once competitors in the business, have the same point of view. Darkin, for example, thinks that it is necessary to

establish a moratorium on catching specific kinds of crab. Kozhemyako suggests giving large sea tracts as private concessions for many years. They believe that if there is one owner, he will put an end to the poaching and himself regulate the catch and use of resources. Darkin, defending the interests of the large fishing companies, advised Putin during his trip to the Far East to limit the participants in the fishing industry to a few large companies. They would then deal with the poachers who presumably were preventing them from making profits. But no country in the world uses this approach. Nowhere does the state completely withdraw from the field and allow a small group of oligarchs to regulate business.

Recently several specialists have recommended that all fish caught should be brought back to Russian ports where they will be declared. Only in this way, according to the Association of Primorskii Fishing Enterprises, would it be possible to eliminate the poachers. Putin recently supported this idea and gave an order to solve this problem. But so far bringing the fish back to Russian ports is not a requirement.

Most likely, the problems of the fish industry will remain. No conferences or reports will help. There are too many in Moscow, Kamchatka, Primorye, and Sakhalin who benefit from the current situation. The situation will likely remain the same until there are no more fish and crabs in the sea. Only if there are real trials for not just the fisherman, but the people who send them out to work and those who close their eyes to this barbarism. - Oleg Ssylka in Vladivostok

MERGING REGIONS

IRKUTSK REFERENDUM THREATENED WITH FAILURE. On 16 April Irkutsk Oblast and Ust-Orda Buryatia will hold a referendum on merging into one region. However, the preparation for the voting is going badly - the campaign committee has been criticized for a lack of professionalism and a desire to simply make money. At the same time, Buryats from neighboring regions have begun agitating against the merger. Observers claim that the authorities will have to use tricks to win a sufficient number of votes. For the referendum to be successful, there must be 50 percent turnout on election day and 50 percent of the voters must support the merger. Last year Perm Oblast and the Komi Permyak Autonomous Okrug merged and Krasnoyarsk Krai has voted to merge with Taimyr and Evenkia.

The merger of Irkutsk and Ust-Orda Buryatia has had difficulties from the very beginning. In 2002 these two regions, already well-integrated, were considered pilot regions for merger, serving as an example to others. However, the Ust-Orda elite were opposed, fearful of giving up their benefits. Buryats in other regions also spoke out against the merger.

In contrast to other small peoples living in Russia, the Buryats have three regions designated for them: Ust-Orda Autonomous Okrug, Agin Buryatia Autonomous Okrug, and the Republic of Buryatia. Until 1937, these three regions, as well as Irkutsk and Chita oblasts, were united into the Buryat-Mongol Republic. However, fearing Buryat separatism, Stalin divided up the republic into several regions, subordinating Ust-Orda Buryatia Autonomous Okrug to Irkutsk and Agin-Buryatia to Chita in Russia's unusual "matroshka federalism." The autonomous okrugs are simultaneously separate regions and

subordinate to the oblast on whose territory they are located. Neither of these two okrugs borders on the republic of Buryatia.

When the campaign to merge Ust-Orda into Irkutsk began, the Buryats understood that their dream to merge the three regions would never be realized. According to Nikolai Tsyrempilov, the chairman of the republican association of young scholars, which includes a lot of opposition-minded Buryat scholars, 2,000 people signed a petition to President Putin and the State Duma requesting the restoration of the Buryat-Mongol republic. The Ministry of Regional Development answered them that the constitution forbid the merger of regions that were not contiguous. Now the group has attracted the attention of the law enforcement agencies and the Federal Security Service, according to Tsyrempilov.

A recent round table at Buryat State University in Ulan-Ude raised similar themes. Speakers called for the "territorial rehabilitation of the Buryat people," opposed the merger, accused the federal authorities of spreading fascism, and suggested appealing to the UN and other international bodies.

In Ust-Orda, unknown activists recently published 10,000 brochures opposing the merger. In order to protect themselves from repercussions, the authors did not identify themselves or the publishing house, a violation of Russian law.

Another problem in pressing through the merger is a split among the regional elite of Irkutsk. Governor Aleksandr Tishanin was appointed to this post a year ago and has yet to fully master his new position. In neighboring Krasnoyarsk, the Kremlin essentially assigned several big businesses responsibility for securing the passage of that region's merger referendum. These firms included Interros, which once employed Krasnoyarsk Governor Aleksandr Khloponen, Russian Aluminum, SUEK coal holding, and others. They created a fund which paid for agitation in favor of the referendum.

The Irkutsk authorities sought to do the same thing. However, in contrast to Khloponen, Irkutsk Governor Tishanin does not have close ties to local big business. He was formerly employed by the Russian railroad monopoly and turned to this company for financial support. Since railroad interests did not share their resources with members of United Russia party, who were obligated to support the referendum, or outside political consultants, they became angry and denounced the campaign organizers since they could not make money from the campaign. Critics also pointed out that the governor's team did a poor job of explaining to voters why the merger would be beneficial. Irkutsk is a reasonably successful, industrially-developed region, while Ust-Orda is a poor agricultural area. Only 15-20 percent of the oblast voters plan to participate in the elections. - Dmitry Vinogradov

REGIONAL ELECTIONS

KURSK ELECTS NEW PARLIAMENT. On 12 March Kursk elected new members to its 45-seat Oblast Duma. According to the new rules, 22 seats were filled through single-member districts and 23 by party list. Of the 42 seats filled, the pro-Kremlin United Russia took 30, a two-thirds majority, the Communist Party, 4, Party of Life, 3, the Democratic Party of Russia and Rodina each took 1, and there are 3 independents. Most of the candidates elected in the districts are businessmen and high-level regional public officials. Since Governor Aleksandr Mikhailov, a former Communist, headed the United

Russia list, the pro-Kremlin party now controls both the executive and legislative branches in the region. This merger of United Russia and the Communists made the elections in Kursk somewhat unusual.

Turnout was 43 percent, well above the necessary 20 percent. Rural residents were the most active voters, with nearly 50 percent turnout. In the major cities of Kursk and Kurchatov, turnout did not top 23 percent in some precincts.

Only three parties crossed the 7 percent barrier required to win seats in the Duma in the party-list voting: United Russia (37.36%), Communists (11.28%), and the Party of Life (7.26%). Several parties were extremely close to the barrier: Democratic Party of Russia (6.99%), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) (6.88%), and the Union of Right Forces (SPS) (6.54%). The Russian Party of Pensioners, Agrarian Party of Russia, and the Patriots were not competitive. Almost 10 percent of the voters cast their ballot marked "against all" overall and in three districts "against all" was the top vote-getter, necessitating repeat elections. In the district were former Russian vice president and Kursk governor Aleksandr Rutskoi had planned to run before the court canceled his registration, more than 30 percent of the voters rejected all candidates.

On 17 March, SPS, LDPR, and the People's Will party filed complaints about alleged irregularities in the balloting to the Central Electoral Commission and the president, calling on them to examine the results more carefully. Rutskoi had led the People's Will party list, but the court struck it from the elections, claiming that it had improperly registered its candidates. The three parties complained that an unusually large number of voters cast their ballots at home rather than coming to the polling place. They also complained that a suspiciously large number of ballots had been declared invalid. Members of the local electoral commission rejected the accusations, saying that they expected such complaints from SPS and LDPR since they were so close to passing the 7 percent barrier, but did not quite make it.

The campaign was filled with scandals and court cases. Rodina was struck from running in the party-list part of the elections. The reason for removing Rodina was a complaint from the Kursk branch of the Party of Pensioners focusing on the way that Rodina compiled its party list and for violations of the federal law on political parties, because Rodina allegedly purchased votes by handing out automobile air fresheners with the party symbol. The LDPR also ran into trouble in February when it broadcast cartoon advertisements claiming that Governor Mikhailov was an alcoholic. The cartoons were only broadcast once and then the oblast electoral commission forbid their broadcast as insulting the honor and dignity of the governor and president. The Central Electoral Commission overturned this decision, but the local television stations refused to broadcast the ads. The LDPR claimed that they were being censored, but the local TV stations said that they did not want to participate in a crime since the oblast procurator had filed slander charges in relation to the ads. - Sergei Sarychev in Kursk

SCIENCE AND ESPIONAGE

NOVOSIBIRSK SCIENTIST QUESTIONED ABOUT STATE SECRETS. On 17 March, the Novosibirsk branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB) questioned for many hours world renowned scientist Oleg Korobeinichev, an employee of the Institute for Chemical Kinetics and Combustion, which is part of the Russian Academy of

Sciences, to determine if he had exposed state secrets, a violation of article 283 of the criminal code, according to Natalya Markasova, the head of the Novosibirsk procurator's press service. So far the FSB has not formally accused the scientist and released him to return home after he signed an agreement not to flee. If found guilty of releasing state secrets, Korobeinichev would face up to four years in prison.

The Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences has refused to discuss the case, noting that the material is "secret." Korobeinichev also has not publicly discussed the details, saying that he "has not thought through what has happened." He said that any information about the case appearing in the press is "rumors and conjectures."

The 65-year old Korobeinichev has spent his entire life in the defense sector working on rocket technology. He is a well-known specialist in the field of combustion. He has worked in Novosibirsk since 1961, doing research and teaching in the university. His research is considered cutting edge, with its main application being in military rockets.

Korobeinichev's laboratory works with a variety of international institutions, including the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Cornell University, the US Institute of Standards and Technology, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Cambridge University, and Belgium's Catholic University in Leuven.

The Novosibirsk branch of the FSB public relations office told this correspondent that since Novosibirsk is one of Russia's most important science centers, it is annually visited by foreigners who work in some way with the intelligence agencies of their home countries. For example, in 2005, according to the FSB, there were dozens of professional spies trying either officially or unofficially to gain access to secret information. The FSB sees operatives coming from the West (Europe and the USA) and East (China, Japan, India, Israel, and Iran).

The city of Akademgorodok, where many scientific research institutes are concentrated, is of particular interest. Once shrouded in secrecy, Akademgorodok in the 1990s lost most of its state subsidies and its scientists were struggling to survive. Many began to work actively with foreign institutes, receiving financial support for their scientific work. According to the FSB, possibly some of these contacts exceed the law.

Korobeinichev's colleagues confirm that his articles published in Russia and abroad do not contain secret data. However, they note that Korobeinichev might suffer from the frequently changing rules in the area of preserving state secrets. These rules are constantly toughened and what in the 1990s was considered open, now is again stamped "secret," as in Soviet times. In 2004, the secrecy offices of the institutes in Akademgorodok received a new list of materials, 65-pages long, forbidden for publication. Possibly, some in the institute speculate, some of the previous works of the scholar inadvertently violated the new rules.

In recent years, other Russian scientists have come under suspicion. Considerable attention focused on the cases of Igor Sutyagin (Moscow) and Valentin Danilov (Krasnoyarsk), who are considered by Amnesty International to be political prisoners. Sutyagin, an employee of the Institute of the USA and Canada, was arrested in 1999 and later sentenced to 15 years. The Russian court found Sutyagin guilty of passing secrets to a British consulting firm, but Sutyagin's defenders say he was working with publicly available information. Danilov was found innocent in his first jury trial, but retried by a

second jury, which found him guilty of selling equipment containing secret information to China and he was sentenced to 14 years.

Another case is under way in Ufa, where the 66 year-old physicist Oskar Kaibyshev is facing charges of exporting dual-use technology to South Korea. He faces a potential 10-year term if found guilty. According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Kaibyshev's research has long been in the public domain and does not contain state secrets.

There are also cases of Russian scholars being arrested abroad. In February Sweden arrested biologist Andrei Zamyatin in the college town of Uppsala. The Swedish special services suspect that he was involved in espionage. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

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American University and the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center

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REGIONAL POLITICS

KOMI AUTHORITIES TIGHTEN HOLD ON POWER. The Komi authorities, now associated with the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, are currently waging a battle to secure a political monopoly in the republic. Putin recently appointed Governor Vladimir Torlopov to another term and the regional legislature elected United Russia faction head Marina Istikhovskaya as its chairwoman. Such success may be costly, however, because the republican leaders are now accountable for the many challenges Komi faces, which would make them vulnerable in the 2007 regional and federal parliamentary elections.

Several problems are threatening the republic. It is necessary to resettle tens of thousands of residents from the northern mining cities of Inta and Vorkuta to warmer and more economically viable areas, but little progress is being made. Despite official promises to increase funding for this program, current funding is actually less than in past years (*Respublika*, 27 January and 1 March). Discontent in the north is increasing. There are also growing problems in the republic's agricultural sector, which employs a quarter of the population, and in the development of the forestry industry, which provides jobs for the rural population.

These problems caused Anatolii Karakchiev, the head of the Komi branch of the United Russia party, to resign his post. He made clear that his decision was motivated by the fear that his party would lose the elections coming in 2007. He sought to avoid being blamed for these problems, and proposed that his political opponent Chairwoman Istikhovskaya take over the republican party leadership. A final vote on her candidacy will be taken at the end of April at the party conference.

At the same time, the authorities are asserting increasing pressure on the Rodina party, the most powerful voice of the opposition in the republic. Komi's Rodina branch is led by former Syktyvkar mayor Sergei Katunin, who was long in confrontation with Governor Torlopov. Katunin charged that the republican authorities were pressuring Rodina members to rebel against their leader. One businessman was apparently told in the Syktyvkar mayor's office that he would have trouble with his activities if he remained active in Rodina (*Zyryaskaya zhizn'*, 13 March). Nevertheless, on 11 March the Rodina party conference elected Katunin a delegate to the party congress. It also set the task of establishing its own newspaper and seeking to appear on television. Since the local branch of Yabloko is loyal to the regional authorities and the Union of Right Forces (SPS) and Vladimir Zhinovsky's LDPR are not serious political groups in the republic, the authorities have targeted Rodina as the main potential opposition.

Naturally, the establishment of a political monopoly will lead to greater opportunities for corruption in the republic. There is less monitoring of the authorities' activities, giving them the opportunity to convert their political dominance into increased sources of income. At a meeting of the Komi State Council to discuss economic security, Istikhovskaya warned that corruption, trading in fake alcohol, and failure to pay taxes were increasing every day. According to the republican police, the level of economic crime in the republic grew 16 percent in 2005 over 2004 and is up 30 percent since 2000. Komi has the highest crime rate in the Northwest federal district, with 59.1 crimes per 10,000 population (compared to 48.7 in St. Petersburg and 37.9 in Arkhangelsk).

With the strengthening of the political monopoly in Komi, the authorities are becoming increasingly closed to the public. According to a republican poll we conducted in 2004, 43 percent of the respondents said that "business and the authorities" had power in the republic, while only 25.5 percent felt it was actually in the hands of the state authorities. - Yurii Shabaev in Syktyvkar

CORRUPTION

RESEARCH SHOWS HIGH LEVELS OF CORRUPTION IN TYUMEN OBLAST.

A poll of social organization activists, local politicians, local government workers, and businesspeople suggests high levels of corruption in Tyumen Oblast, according to researchers at the Institute for Communal Strategies, the Tyumen Civil University regional foundation, and the American Bar Association. The poll was conducted in February and the results were presented at a conference held 27 February to 1 March in Tobolsk.

These poll results suggest much higher levels of corruption than similar polls conducted in Russia. Thus, half of those surveyed said that they or members of their family had found it necessary to give a bribe in the previous 12 months. According to data from Transparency International (TI) for Russia as a whole, 17 percent had given a

bribe, while a VTsIOM survey from 2000 suggested that 30 percent had done so. The research found much greater corruption in Tyumen Oblast than did a 2002 INDEM/TI survey of corruption in Russian regions.

Half of those who paid bribes said that they did so in order to avoid lines or bureaucracy. One third said that they paid for services that they were entitled to by law. Nearly 20 percent who paid bribes said that they wanted to avoid problems with the authorities.

In 44 percent of the cases, the respondents said that they knew in advance that they "would not be able to avoid paying a bribe." Twenty-two percent said that the bureaucrat initiated the bribe, while a similar amount said that they took the initiative. Of those giving a bribe, 69 percent said that the size of the bribe was clear to them and only 5 percent did not know how much to give.

The respondents were particularly critical of corruption among local government officials. A full 62 percent said that local officials had created an artificial monopoly for their personal firms; 47 percent said that public officials were seeking property for their firms; 62 percent saw them as providing protection for specific firms; 49 percent were aware of firms led by public officials or their relatives; 41 percent said that the officials exerted pressure in favor of specific contractors; 40 percent saw them as facilitating artificial bankruptcies; 34 percent saw local authorities seeking blocking or controlling stakes in local firms; 35 percent saw them as setting up tax and other benefits for specific firms; and 47 percent of the population saw the officials as being able to appoint their allies to the leadership of specific firms.

In terms of solutions for corruption, 53 percent called for establishing clear procedures by which officials must address tasks and 45 percent said that punishments for accepting bribes should be increased. Most respondents were skeptical about such measures as electing honest deputies and citizen activism (not giving bribes, talking publicly about extortion), though 40 percent said it was necessary to increase the culture of Russian citizens. Only one quarter thought it would be useful to raise the salaries of the public officials.

In follow-up focus group interviews, two-thirds said that were ready not to give bribes, but that they were not prepared to announce this publicly or work in social organizations that advocate for these causes. No one was prepared to tell the law enforcement agencies about cases of corruption known to them. The respondents generally did not support other activities that would mean their personal involvement in the battle against corruption. About half of the respondents think that it is important for the public officials to be effective rather than honest.

The conference, whose participants included employees of the law enforcement agencies, representatives of accounting chambers, legislators, and journalists, developed a series of proposals for fighting corruption. Among the suggestions was giving local legislators the right to monitor not only the expenditures of local budgets, but all money coming from the federal level for specific programs. The participants also considered it necessary to make all expenditures more transparent. Additionally, the participants proposed uniting all regulations concerning the provision of benefits to enterprises into one law and strengthening oversight to ensure the effective use of these benefits. - Elena Arbatskaya in Tyumen

HAZING

BASHKORTOSTAN FACES ON-GOING PROBLEMS. The phenomenon of hazing became widely known in post-Soviet Russia thanks to the development of glasnost in the late 1980s. The media describes cases of harsh abuse of new recruits to the army, as a result of which the victims commit suicide, desert, or shoot their fellow soldiers who torture them. Each year there are more than a thousand cases of hazing with deadly consequences, but the media only describes a few of them.

The problems of hazing have received new attention in Russia thanks to the recent case of a soldier in Chelyabinsk who suffered the loss of his legs. However, most cases of hazing are never reported, and never have an impact on the civilian or military authorities, who do not look kindly on the attempts of social organizations or victims' relatives to defend soldiers' rights. The authorities not only remain quiet about cases of hazing, describing them as the fabrications of human rights groups, but go on the attack against human rights groups, accusing them of pursuing political goals and looking for ways to prosecute them.

These practices are characteristic of Bashkortostan, as several recent cases have demonstrated. Bashkortostan resident Ilnur Kharisov, who was serving in Vladikavkaz, was badly beaten because he was not able to fulfill the orders of the other soldiers as quickly as they wanted. He was taken to the hospital where he required extensive surgery to mend serious head wounds. The court subsequently ordered the Defense Ministry to pay him 50 thousand rubles. However, the Bashkortostani branch of the federal treasury refused to pay the judgment, noting that the sum was not provided for in the budget. The case is expected to take a long time to resolve.

Another new recruit named Maksim from Bashkortostan served in Moscow Oblast and was beaten several times for reasons he could not explain. When he ended up in the hospital, he was accused of trying to avoid his military duties. In the unit where he served, there have been several attempts at suicide and more than 30 soldiers have deserted.

It is very difficult for soldiers to find support among their officers, according to Vladimir Simarchuk, the former chairman of the Committee to Defend Soldiers from Bashkortostan and an officer who had fought in Afghanistan. The officers frequently close their eyes to such abuse and even participate in it. In February 2006 Nusrulla Dautov, a soldier from Dagestan serving in Bashkortostan, died with many blows on his face and body. The procurator has refused to give any details about what happened. The military authorities say that he fell down and hurt himself. On 29 January, another soldier from Bashkortostan, Anton Peskov, died in the hospital after he failed to receive timely treatment.

Simarchuk's group frequently speaks out about the difficult conditions of the soldiers and criticizes the authorities for their indifference to their problems. Most likely, it is no coincidence that Simarchuk was accused of unwanted sexual advances on a soldier who had deserted from his unit and sought help. Simarchuk was sentenced to four years in prison. Simarchuk's lawyer and his fellow human rights crusaders think that Simarchuk was the victim of a provocation since he was a thorn in the side of the military authorities.

The Bashkortostani authorities have for many years in a row received citations from the Russian military leadership for their successes in exceeding their quotas in finding new recruits. In this sphere, Bashkortostan leads all of Russia, even though local human rights defenders believe that local military commissions often sign up young men who are physically unfit for military service. - Igor Rabinovich in Ufa

AUTOMOBILE PRODUCTION

AFTER OWNERSHIP TRANSFER AT AVTOVAZ, CHANGE IN CITY AUTHORITIES POSSIBLE. In December 2005, the state-owned arms export monopoly Rosoboroneksport took control of AvtoVAZ, Russia's largest automobile manufacturer, based in Togliatti, Samara Oblast. Now the federal authorities are apparently preparing to exert greater oversight over the city's leadership.

Following their audit of the automobile factory, the Accounting Chamber and the tax police are expected to examine the work of the Togliatti mayor's office.

Kremlin officials are planning to replace Togliatti mayor Nikolai Utkin with someone close to the new factory owners, Togliatti City Duma member Borislav Grinblat claimed in a recent interview with the local press. The new mayor will be responsible for maintaining order in the city, which, thanks to the presence of the factory, is filled with organized crime.

Special operations carried out by the Federal Security Service and the local Department for Combating Organized Crime revealed extensive illegal production of spare parts at the factory. According to these investigations, AvtoVAZ produced 80 million rubles worth of parts each week off the books. The leadership of Rosoboroneksport announced that it planned to end organized crime's access to AvtoVAZ production. Currently, the factory's new leadership has fired 70 percent of the top managers who worked at the plant before the arrival of the state arms export monopolist.

The Samara governor's office is concerned about the upcoming audit of the Togliatti mayor's office. The auditors' findings could serve as the basis for Governor Konstantin Titov to fire the mayor. The last time the Accounting Chamber audited AvtoVAZ in 2003, it filed charges against exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky for financial machinations at the factory through LogoVAZ and the AVVA firm. - Sergei Khazov in Samara

LABOR RELATIONS

MORDOVIA'S LARGEST FACTORY LOCKS OUT EMPLOYEES. Since October 2005, Mordovia's largest factory, light bulb producer Lisma, has been engaged in a labor dispute with many of its employees because wages have gone unpaid for several months. The result has been a series of strikes and pickets.

All of these actions have taken place without the support of the plant's labor unions. The union leaders have tried to talk the workers into continuing to work as they seek agreement with management about securing payment of their wages. The workers do not support the position of the union leaders and many of them have resigned their union membership.

At the end of 2005, drivers in the factory car pool struck and successfully won three months of back wages. However, the general problem at the factory has not been resolved.

Since 2003, Lisma has been part of Viktor Stolpovskii's holding company V.A.V.S. Several of the plant's units are now idle and the management has prevented the workers from returning after the latest round of strikes. Management had offered to pay part of the salaries, but the workers demanded payment in full. In response, the factory director ordered four shops to close. This is the first time in Mordovia that management has taken such action in response to a worker protest. Formally, the director said that the shutdown was due to overproduction and the accumulation of too many products on the factory shelves. Management also refuses to pay two-thirds of the average wage to the workers during the lockout, a requirement of the Russian labor code.

Mordovia prime minister Vladimir Volkov has set up a special group to deal with the situation. He said that the republican government will help the enterprise pay off its 40 million ruble debt to its employees. He told the local television station Channel 10, that it would be impossible to solve the dispute quickly, but suggested that it would be possible to improve the situation and hoped that the plant would relaunch the idled production lines quickly. - Igor Telin in Saransk

POLITICAL OPPOSITION

KASPAROV WARNS OF EARLY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. Former Chess Champion Garry Kasparov, leader of the United Civil Front (OGF), claimed that there was a 50 percent chance that the presidential elections in Russia would take place ahead of schedule or in a format not confirmed by the constitution because the incumbents do not want to leave while appearing in Ulyanovsk on 1 March. During the last month, Kasparov has held negotiations with a variety of parties seeking to form a united front across of variety of ideologies against the Kremlin. He asserted that the opposition had a small, but realistic, chance to field a single presidential candidate.

Kasparov said that the Kremlin is using the media it controls to label all opposition "fascist," making the main task of the Kremlin to fight against "fascist sympathizers." "I, for example, have become a 'fascist sympathizer,'" Kasparov joked.

Kasparov charged that the main source of corruption in the country today is in the country's top leadership. He said that the government is becoming Russia's most powerful businessman, nationalizing all expenses, while privatizing all income. He said that this situation cannot last forever and would ultimately lead to a systemic crisis. He warned that there is a lot of money now in Moscow, but very little investment in the domestic economy: "all financial flows go through Kremlin bureaucrats." He charged that the authorities are avoiding a serious discussion on how to further develop Russia.

Kasparov said that the Yukos case was created not for a battle against the oligarchs, but to allow them to take complete power. He warned, however, that the new system could not survive long. So far, the people's unhappiness with the authorities has not transformed into an active civil response, however, despite Putin's high personal popularity, some of his policies do not have majority support, according to recent opinion polls that Kasparov cited.

Representatives of political parties and social organizations as well as journalists attended Kasparov's talk. There were no important businessmen present, however, apparently because they fear that having contact with the opposition would discredit them in the eyes of the authorities. The regional authorities also refused to meet with Kasparov, as is typical of Kasparov's trips through the regions during the last year.

Kasparov's basic idea is that Russia is approaching a systemic crisis directly connected to the growth of the bureaucratic apparatus and the irresponsible policies of the current authorities. He said that Russia's current leaders consider themselves irreplaceable because of the anti-democratic electoral legislation now in place. Additionally, he said that one of the main demands of the United Civil Front should be a return to free elections, noting that the main factor was how long the population was willing to tolerate the tyranny of the authorities. Kasparov claimed that over the last year he has managed to radicalize the liberal opposition. He asserted that when people realized that the deterioration in their living standards is connected to their loss of a right to vote in free and fair elections, there could be a social explosion.

Kasparov is one of Putin's harshest critics. His announcement that there is the possibility of a single opposition candidate in the next presidential elections is an evolution in his position. When he visited Ulyanovsk in August 2005, Kasparov cautiously avoided answering questions about the appearance of such a leader. - Sergei Gogin in Ulyanovsk

ISLAM IN RUSSIA

PERM'S TOP MUSLIM LEADER SACKED. The end of January and beginning of February marked a purge of Muslim leaders in Russia's regions. On 1 February, Mufti Mukhammadgali Khuzin was fired from his post as head of the Perm Oblast Regional Spiritual Department of Muslims, which is part of the Central Spiritual Department of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM). A similar event occurred in Yamal Nenets Autonomous Okrug, where Farid Salman, the head of the local Muslims was also fired. Khuzin held a powerful place among Russian Muslims since he was head of the executive committee of the TsDUM, a position he also lost.

Khuzin was well known for the special zeal with which he pursued radical Muslim "wahhabis." He stressed the need to fight against banned Islamist organizations, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. He also advocated using Stalinist methods against "wahhabis" (Islam.ru, 25 October 2005). Seemingly the crackdown on Muslim youth in Nalchik following the attack there in October 2005 implemented his philosophy. Among other things, Khuzin called for ethnic cleansing in the farmers' markets that exist in many Russian cities and proposed the idea of taking away pensions and benefits from relatives of those convicted of terrorism. However, the use of mass arrests and torture after the attack on Nalchik provoked such unhappiness among Muslim circles that Kabardino-Balkaria's new president Arsen Kanokov had to devote considerable energy to reducing tensions in that North Caucasus republic. Against this background, Khuzin's calls seemed irresponsible. In order to restore its authority, the TsDUM had to disassociate itself from such leaders.

The new leader of Perm Muslims will be Mauletin Mustozyap, former adviser to TsDUM leader Talgat Tadzhuiddin for the northwest region of Bashkortostan. Mustozyap

said that Khuzin focused too much on politics, while ignoring the needs of the poor and devout. Apparently sensing that he was about to be fired, Khuzin attacked Tadzhuiddin in the press shortly before his dismissal, appealing for support to the Russian Security Council, presidential administration, and Federal Security Service (Islam.ru, 1 February 2006).

The conflict within the TsDUM has evolved over several months. Initially, Khuzin and Salman tried to remove Tadzhuiddin with support from the Russian Orthodox Church's Department for External Church Ties. Later these young muftis were fired.

This conflict highlights a deep crisis in the TsDUM. This organization is losing authority among Muslims. Accordingly, the Kremlin and Russian authorities are trying to distance themselves from its leaders. In recent times, the Kremlin is aligning itself with a younger Muslim structure - the Council of Muftis of Russia under the leadership of Ravil Gainutdin. In order to preserve its authority, the TsDUM is trying to disassociate itself from the more notorious regional figures among its ranks.

These events further demonstrate the destructive role that "apparat Islam" and official Muslim organizations are playing at the regional level. As the well-known Islamist thinker Geidar Dzhemal has described them, these organizations are "political provocateurs" with "insignificant organizational weight and status." The leaders of Russia's official Islamic structures are mainly consumed with the battle over mosques, money, and power. With little support among the masses, these leaders seek to ally themselves with the state and its repressive apparatus. These leaders declare their loyalty by calling themselves bearers of "Russian Muslim patriotism" or defenders of "traditional Eurasian Islam." As a result, the official Islamic structures and the ordinary Muslims are heading in different directions. - Arbakhan Magomedov in Ulyanovsk

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CIVIC CHAMBER

REGIONS FACE DIFFICULTIES ESTABLISHING CHAMBERS. Leaders of Russia's regions have begun setting up regional Civic Chambers on the model of the federal body that started working at the beginning of 2006. Observers expect that these chambers will represent the views of the authorities rather than those of society. Moreover, in several regions, such chambers already exist and they are independent of the authorities. Now regional leaders are trying to close them.

The law on civic chambers that went into effect on 1 July 2005 envisioned the creation of a federal chamber and then chambers in the regions. The authorities claim that the chambers will represent civil society and provide a basis for social organizations to work with the authorities, providing advice on legislation for example. For the federal Civic Chamber, the president appointed the first third of the membership (42 members). These individuals then appointed the second third from various organizations, and then the two thirds picked the final third from candidates nominated by regional social groups. Given this method of forming the new body, it is not surprising that critics claim that its members will all be loyal to the authorities. In the regions, the appointment of members was under the strict control of the seven presidential envoys.

The Novosibirsk regional chamber will consist of three parts, each with 44 members. The first part will consist of representatives of each raion in the oblast and every ten raions in the city of Novosibirsk. The second part will be formed from representatives of organizations without taking into account where they are located. Members of the regional legislature, rather than the governor, will choose the candidates for these positions. Once assembled, the members of the first two thirds of the body will

choose the final third from "the most authoritative and respected" people proposed by experts and professional societies.

Neither the federal nor the regional chambers "reflect the social structure of Russian society," according to the leader of the Communist faction in the Novosibirsk oblast legislature, Vladimir Karpov. However, the author of the Novosibirsk bill establishing the chamber, Nadezhda Vavilina, who is a member of the federal chamber from Novosibirsk, said that the regional chamber would be more representative than the Moscow chamber: "Each territory of the oblast will be represented, whereas in the Russian chamber most representatives are from Moscow." According to Governor Viktor Tolokonskii, the chamber will cost about 300,000 rubles a year, mainly to pay for the delegates' travel from the raions to Novosibirsk for chamber meetings.

In several regions, the formation of the chamber has led to scandals because these regions already have such chambers that were created "from below." Accordingly, they are not necessarily loyal to the authorities and not always able to influence their work.

In Omsk Oblast, a Civic Chamber was established in 2004. According to its chairman Vladimir Kozlov, the chamber plans to fight with the oblast authorities to continue to work under its current name: "If they close us, we will sue the authorities." Moreover, he asserted, "we are doing real work, while what they are creating now in the oblast will be a decorative organization, whose members will be subordinate to the oblast authorities, and therefore will not criticize the authorities."

The members of the working group to form the new Omsk Civic Chamber includes representatives of the region's executive and legislative branches, local government, social groups, universities, and business. The chairman of the group is the governor's chief of staff Aleksandr Artemov. Of the 24 members of the new chamber, Governor Leonid Polezhaev will pick 8, Omsk city social organizations will pick 8, and social organizations from the rural areas will pick 8.

The fate of the oblast's original chamber is not clear. "The federal law on social organizations limits the existence in each region of organizations with the same names," said the head of the Omsk Oblast department for registering social and religious organizations of the federal registration service Vladimir Fadyaev. Thus if the authorities set up a new civic chamber, presumably the old one would have to be dissolved.

Addressing the same situation in Kemerovo Oblast, the administration of Governor Aman Tuleev was more decisive. There the Civic Chamber has existed since 1994. It participated in discussing oblast laws and the ecological and demographic problems of the region. The chamber included 78 social and 21 non-profit oblast organizations.

According to the head of the oblast administration's department for relations with social groups Svetlana Snitskaya, it was necessary to form a new chamber because the old chamber was a social organization and it would not make sense to give it the responsibilities now assigned to such chambers by law. Additionally, the old chamber contained representatives of political parties and religions, which is not allowed in the new law (Mordova's authorities have a different view, see next article).

The Kemerovo legislature adopted that region's law on the chamber on 22 February. This chamber will have 45 members: 15 chosen by the governor, 15 by the oblast council, and these 30 will pick 15 representatives of social organizations. In contrast to neighboring regions, local government will not play a role in the chamber.

The Kemerovo authorities began to battle with the old chamber in November 2005. First ten social organizations sent a letter to the presidential administration seeking to block chamber chairman Vladimir Lebedev from becoming a member of the Russian chamber. Then the Federal Registration Service ordered the group to give up its name. At the beginning of March, the Kemerovo department for fighting economic crime took all accounting documents from the group, after which its activity was paralyzed. Now the procurator is examining whether it was legal for Kuzbassenergo to provide financing to the chamber and how these funds were actually spent. Chamber head Lebedev claimed that the authorities were trying to "discredit the current chamber leadership and create a new structure, whose members would only represent social organizations loyal to Governor Tuleev." Kuzbassenergo insisted that its sponsorship was legal. Several years ago the authorities had asked Kuzbassenergo to provide this support since they then thought that the chamber served a useful purpose. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

MORDOVIA SPS LEADER CRITICIZES FORMATION OF CHAMBER.

"Mistaken" is how Maksim Osovskii, the head of the Mordovia branch of the Union of Right Forces (SPS), described Mordovia President Nikolai Merkushkin's proposal to include political parties in the republic's Civic Chamber. Osovskii argued that the proposal violated the federal law on political parties, which states that "political parties are established for participating in social and political actions, in elections and referenda, and also for representing the interests of citizens in state and local institutions." "The goal of a party," Osovskii said, "is participating in the political life of society, not participating in the Civic Chamber set up by the executive branch appointed by the president. This activity will contradict the charters of the party organizations registered in the republic."

However, the head of the regional branch of the SPS said that party representatives could join the republic's Civic Chamber, but only if they were nominated by one of the social organizations in the republic. In this case they would have to suspend their membership in the political party leaderships while they serve in the chamber, since they should represent social organizations there, not their political parties.

Rather than including parties in the Chamber, Osovskii suggested using the social principle in forming Mordovia's Civic Chamber: setting aside quotas for the least prosperous parts of the population. For example, he suggested using quotas for school children, college students, and veterans. He also proposed special quotas for women, so that at least half of the seats in the Chamber would be filled by women. - Igor Telin in Saransk

REGIONAL ELECTIONS

ADYGEYA ELECTIONS SHOW STRONGER OPPOSITION. The new Adygeya republican parliament elected on 12 March will not be as obedient to the republican president as the previous body. President Khazret Sovmen and some of the legislators have been fighting over whether Adygeya should be merged into Krasnodar Krai, a more prosperous region that completely surrounds Adygeya. Sovmen supports maintaining the republic's independence, a position that naturally serves his personal bureaucratic interests and those of other republican officials, while the opposition supports merging with the larger region. Sovmen claims the continued existence of Adygeya will protect

the interests of the republic's titular ethnic group, the Adygs, while advocates of the merger assert that joining Krasnodar will provide valuable economic benefits.

Turnout for the voting was relatively high, at 47 percent. Four political parties cleared the 7 percent barrier to join the parliament: United Russia (34%), Communists (15%), Agrarians (11%), and the relatively unknown Russian United Industrial Party. This party won 13 percent of the vote by campaigning openly for the merger of Adygeya into Krasnodar Krai.

Those supporting a merger worked through other parties as well, but they avoided open confrontation with the republican authorities and accusations of "Russian nationalism and chauvinism" by not advocating merger directly. The Communist Party, for example, called for "all-sided integration of Adygeya for the territorial and economic development of the entire region," though some individual candidates running for single-member district seats did openly advocate merger. United Russia also supported this kind of "integration." The pro-Kremlin party repeatedly broadcast an advertisement in which Krasnodar Governor Aleksandr Tkachev talked about the necessity of "integration," but not merger. According to the chairman of the executive committee of the Adygeya Union of Slavs Vladimir Karataev, the main result of the elections was to legitimize the slogan of merging Adygeya with Krasnodar: "if earlier people were afraid to think of this, now candidates and parties openly advocate it."

Ethnic Russians make up 64 percent of the republic's population. Many of them support merger because they believe it will provide them with more opportunities. Many currently claim that ethnic Russians are underrepresented in the republican government, while ethnic Adygeyans are overrepresented. Besides ethnic Russians, supporters of a merger include some Adygs and some representatives of other groups. The Russians often claim that they are the subject of discrimination as a result of the policy of favoring hiring Adygs for positions in the republican government.

Many leaders and activists of Adyg ethnic organizations strongly support an independent Adygeya. In an effort to preserve the republic, its defenders often warn of "unpredictable consequences" if the republic were to be merged. These statements proved to be effective because the federal authorities had to step back from their previously announced policy of merging regions. Thus, Adygeya Procurator Mikhail Prikhlenko speaking at the end of February said that "the thesis of merging Adygeya and Krasnodar is today absolutely baseless." At the same time, Prikhlenko has tried to take a balanced position by threatening the criminal prosecution of extremists on both sides. He said, "Nationalists of all types should be prosecuted before the elections or after them..." The procurator also warned the opposition against "publicly counting the number of Adygs in the institutions of power." (*Sovetskaya Adygeya*, 28 February).

Despite the procurator's warnings, competition for any state position in the North Caucasus has a strong ethnic character. The topic of ethnic representation in the institutions of power stands at the center of social attention and political games. Moreover, the independent media actively discusses this issue.

Local observers believe that even though the pro-Kremlin United Russia won a plurality, its showing was not as good as one might expect, given the support of the state-sponsored Russian media, Putin's authority, and secret financial sponsors. Winning a third of the votes, with approximately 50 percent turnout, means that it may be difficult

for the party to repeat its success of the 2003 State Duma elections in 2007 and the successful placement of a successor to Putin in 2008. - Oleg Tsvetkov in Maikop

ORGANIZED CRIME

CRIMINAL AUTHORITY SENTENCED IN NOVOSIBIRSK. On 26 February, a Novosibirsk court sentenced Andrei Strykh, the region's most famous crime boss, to nine years in jail for ordering the assassination of a business partner. Strykh was a personal friend of the Olympic champion Aleksandr Karelin, a member of the local United Russia political council, a leader of the local branch of Sporting Russia, and had twice sought public office.

The 37-year-old Strykh is known to most residents of Novosibirsk. Even though he had not been incarcerated previously, he was considered one of the region's criminal leaders. According to the unwritten rules of the crime world, real criminal authorities should have at least one sentence in their past.

Strykh and his friends, members of the so-called May First Crime Group, had grown up together in hard scrabble May First neighborhood on the edge of Novosibirsk. Olympic champion Karelin also started his career there. Strykh trained in wrestling under Karelin's friend, the famous coach Aleksandr Nesterenko, known in criminal circles as "Nester." After Nesterenko's murder in 1995, Strykh took over the leadership of the May First club of Single Combat. Strykh supporters describe the club as a charity, providing free sports training to young people. Critics say it is a recruiting ground for organized crime. In fact, the members of the club are known in equal measure for their sporting accomplishments and criminal exploits.

According to the law enforcement agencies, money to support the club allegedly came from the semi-legal and illegal businesses of Strykh and his associates. Strykh is also interested in purely legitimate business and owns shares in the coal and metal enterprises of Kemerovo Oblast and Krasnoyarsk Krai.

But the foundation of Strykh's empire is influence over the Gusinobrodskii Market, the largest trading center in Asian Russia. In the battle to maintain influence at the market between various criminal and law enforcement groups, there have been numerous contract killings. Strykh may have been involved in some of these. He has survived numerous attacks on his life, losing his first wife and cousin in attacks that fell short of their real target.

Despite his reputation, the law enforcement authorities for a long time did not succeed in tying Strykh to any crimes. In 2003, there were rumors in the city's political circles that Strykh would run for the State Duma. At that time several organized crime figures were already sitting in the city and oblast legislatures. Given his popularity among the public, the possibility of winning a mandate was not a fantasy. In the run up to the elections, his opponents among the law enforcement agencies saw to the publication of compromising material in the local media. As his rating and support among public officials started to drop, Strykh dropped out of the race.

In 2004, in response to the earlier attacks and after the murder of Deputy Mayor Valerii Maryasov, who was in charge of the city's markets, Strykh struck back at his accusers in the press, claiming that local policemen had facilitated Maryasov's killing.

The conflict reached its apogee when the authorities accused Starykh of slander, organizing a crime group, and preparing a murder.

Despite these charges, he was only arrested on 21 March 2005, two weeks before elections to the city council, in which he was running. Sitting in jail on 3 April, Starykh took second place, missing a victory by just 0.7 percent of the vote.

Starykh's trials started in the fall of 2005. The court first found him guilty of slandering the police and fined him 250,000 rubles for this offense. Maryasov's murder has never been resolved.

In March 2006, a jury found him guilty of ordering the murder in May 1996 of Torgmashservis company director Gennadii Miller. One of the founders of Torgmashservis was Starykh's first wife Tatyana (murdered in 2001), but Starykh exercised real power. In 1996, Torgmashservis filed a case in the arbitrazh court against the Novosibirsk Chemical Concentrates Plant (NZKhK), which produces fuel for nuclear plants. Torgmashservis claimed that the plant prevented it from fulfilling an order for a third company and was forced to pay fees in compensation. The court found the chemical concentrates plant guilty and ordered it to pay Torgmashservis 10 million rubles.

NZKhK claimed that Torgmashservis had given the court fictitious documents and appealed to the police. By that time Miller had left Torgmashservis and had gone to work for a NZKhK subsidiary. According to the material of the case, he was willing to testify that the documents used to win the case were forged and, on this basis, Starykh decided to murder Miller. The killing took place on 6 May 1996.

The procurator only managed to solve the case in 2004, when a member of the May First crime group described how the gunman had bragged that he received a Mercedes for carrying out the hit. Other witnesses who testified in the case did so anonymously. Starykh's lawyers argued that the witnesses were all Starykh's enemies from criminal circles and that their evidence was not credible. Additionally, Starykh's lawyers argued that there was no way that the arbitration case could have led to Miller's murder. They pointed out that the Novosibirsk Chemical Concentrate Factory had signed a peace agreement with Tormashservis. They say that the most likely reason for Miller's murder was his alleged involvement in trading rare earth and nonferrous metals.

Crucial testimony came from Novosibirsk deputy governor Andrei Filichev, who knew both Miller and Starykh. He said that Miller had complained to him about pressure from the owners of Torgmashservis so that he would testify against NZKhK. Filichev also confirmed that Torgmashservis was controlled by the May First crime group. The Novosibirsk branch of the pro-Kremlin United Russia and several politicians spoke out in Starykh's defense during the trial.

Observers do not expect that Starykh's conviction will reduce the amount of crime in Novosibirsk's markets. Now they are expecting a battle to replace Starykh. The situation is already unsettled as the police are trying to remove some crime groups from the market, but it is not clear how these operations will conclude. - Dmitry Vinogradov

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COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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REGIONAL POLITICS

ADYGEYA LEADER RESIGNS, THEN RETRACTS DECISION. On 4 April Adygeya President Khazret Sovmen unexpectedly announced his resignation at a session of the recently elected republican parliament. Two hours later, however, the president's press service retracted the statement and announced that the president had not in fact resigned.

In an interview published in *Kommersant* on 11 April, Sovmen explained that the reason for his abortive resignation was a conflict with Presidential envoy Dmitrii Kozak, who strongly supported the merger of Adygeya into Krasnodar Krai. Sovmen is opposed to this merger. Sovmen and Kozak met with Presidential Chief of Staff Sergei Sobyenin on 11 April, but the results of that session were not made public.

Sovmen's resignation and retraction are the latest moves in a long running dispute in the republic over ethnic representation in government positions. This dispute previously was not mentioned in the republic's public affairs, but is increasingly coming into the open. On 4 April, a coalition of minority parties in the republican parliament, the Communist Party, the Agrarian Party, and the United Russian Industrial Party, issued a declaration in which they openly complained that ethnic Adygs held a majority of key public offices even though they made up just 24 percent of the population. The statement expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the president, prime minister, and parliamentary speaker were all from the same Adyg group. The three parties also claimed that their interests were constantly ignored and called on opposition groups to launch

"protest actions against the violation of their political interests and rights." They claimed that the failure of the Adygeya authorities to listen to them also pushed them to appeal to the federal authorities to intervene in the republic's personnel policies.

This statement was the first time in Adygeya's post-Soviet history that parliamentary parties spoke openly about the process of pushing ethnic Russians from the government and other prestigious spheres. In previous years, only the Union of Slavs, a social group, spoke openly about these issues.

Ethnic group membership has long been a basis for employment in Adygeya. During the Yeltsin era, there was a republican law on "parity," according to which ethnic Russians and Adygs were appointed to government jobs equally. At that time the population was 22 percent Adyg and 68 percent Russian. After Putin came to power, this law was repealed, but the practice has continued.

Interestingly, the federal authorities also seem to follow the principle of "parity" in appointing individuals to federal posts in the republic. According to the Union of Slavs, there are slightly more ethnic Adygs in federal posts than non-Adygs.

Thus, the gist of the conflict in Adygeya is over patronage, namely the ability to appoint individuals to civil service jobs. Since the basis for appointments is ethnicity, giving this issue wide publicity and involving a wider group of people will inevitably increase social and interethnic tensions. Also likely to increase tensions in the stand off between the Union of Slavs and the Adyg groups, the Cherkess Congress and the Adyge Khase. The Union of Slavs supports the merger of Adygeya with Krasnodar, while the Adyg organizations are categorically against it. They warn of "unpredictable consequences" if the merger goes ahead.

Ethnic tensions are likely to increase as Sovmen's official term as president runs out in January 2007. Most likely the processes surrounding the Kremlin's appointment of a new president, or the unlikely reappointment of Sovmen, will revolve around ethnic issues. As in other North Caucasus republics, the ethnicity of the candidates will be very important.

Against the background of these passions, the federal authorities seem to be a very weak player. Often it even seems that the federal authorities are just observing events. For example, the federal authorities did nothing with Sovmen and his allies took over the pro-Kremlin United Russia party and turned it into an instrument to pursue their own interests. Additionally, the federal authorities have not fully grasped the extent of both sides' resolution to push for their interests. - Oleg Tsvetkov in Maikop

EXTREMISM

SKINHEADS SENTENCED AS ORDINARY CRIMINALS. As has become common in Russia, a Novosibirsk court recently sentenced a group of skinheads, found guilty of beating Central Asian migrants working in the markets and construction sites of Novosibirsk, as ordinary criminals. The judge did not accept charges that they were inciting ethnic conflict. Members of the group received sentences ranging from four years suspended to ten years of incarceration.

The most recent trial, involving a group of 9 skinheads, aged 17-21, lasted two and a half years. According to procurator Vasilii Musatkin, in the beginning of 2002 Mikhail Rodoshkevich, a fourth-year student at the Chemical Technical College

interested in the martial arts and nationalist literature, saw a television report on skinheads in Moscow and decided to set up a similar group among his friends. Over beer, he explained to recruits his belief that Caucasus immigrants were responsible for all of Russia's problems. The friends subsequently exchanged books sent by like-minded colleagues in Moscow or purchased nationalist literature in Novosibirsk book stores. The group soon moved from words to action, purchasing army boots, leather jackets, and camouflage pants. They sewed on to their shirts patches with images of fists and bought white shoelaces, which meant that they were "ready to spill the blood of non-Russians." On several occasions in the summer and fall of 2002, they went out and beat Central Asian migrants in the city.

While the group was operating, Rodoshkevich and several of his friends were arrested for minor crimes several times, but then released, giving them the impression that they were immune from punishment. Rodoshkevich claimed to friends then that he had good connections among the police and that they supported him. Members of the group even argued that the government should support them as a Russian army since they "fought for the interests of the country, risking their lives." The skinheads also extorted money from the migrants, using false police identity papers to inspect markets, check passports, and demand payment for the right to trade at the market.

During the trial, prosecutors questioned about 30 Tajiks (victims and their families) and more than a hundred witnesses, mainly neighbors of the skinheads. During the trial, the skinhead leaders held in jail passed notes to their friends who were still free requesting that they "organize the necessary work with the witnesses." They signed the notes "Glory to Russia" or "Sieg Heil!" Under this pressure, some of the witnesses changed their testimony and others complained to the procurator about the pressure. One witness even received round-the-clock protection. The families of the accused came to all the trials and strongly defended their relatives. They frequently spoke with journalists, claiming that the procurators was carrying out the order of a "Zionist regime" and that there was a "Zionist conspiracy" that prevented the media from covering the trial objectively.

The procurator did not charge the defendants with organizing an extremist association because they did not have a group structure, program, or financing. Judge Larisa Chub further reduced the charges by eliminating the charge of inciting nationalist enmity. She argued that this charge required publicity and since the crimes were committed at night without witnesses, they did not meet this standard. Three skinheads received suspended sentences, four got terms of 6 to 8 years in jail, and one with a criminal record was sentenced to 10 years.

The sentencing in Novosibirsk is similar to recent punishments handed down in St. Petersburg. There Roman Kazakov received five and a half years in a colony for the murder of a nine-year Tajik girl. Another six defendants received 1.5 to 3 years incarceration. As in Novosibirsk, the Petersburg court did not find the attackers guilty of ethnic motives in the murder. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

LAW ENFORCEMENT

VIOLENT POLICE OFFICER SENTENCED TO JAIL. An Ulyanovsk court sentenced now former policeman Aleksandr Kuznetsov, 22, to three and a half years in a

prison colony for using excessive force in carrying out his duties. Upon release, he will not be able to serve in the police force for two years. This case is one of the few in which a policeman must go to jail for abusing his authority. Observers claim that police violence, including torture, is frequent in Russia.

There were five victims willing to testify against Kuznetsov in the case, though 10-12 were involved, half of whom were teenagers. The events in question took place 23 December 2005. The administration of middle school 70 had complained to the police about youth crime groups gathering in the school yard and the police decided to take action that night in an operation named "Kvadrat." Ten police officers, including Kuznetsov, took part in the operation.

According to the witnesses, Kuznetsov, wearing civilian clothes, ordered all present in the yard to lie face down in the snow. He then proceeded to kick them in the body and head, saying that he could do whatever he wanted since he had the permission of the procurator. He kicked one young man in the face when he tried to lift his head. The beating also continued at the police station where the young men were taken. Kuznetsov beat one victim with his pistol, another received face wounds, concussions, a broken nose, and almost lost an eye.

Several of the young men were not members of youth gangs and happened to be in the school yard conducting normal business. Kuznetsov himself could not explain why he had become violent, particularly since none of the young people had put up any resistance. Kuznetsov claimed that he wanted to scare the men so that they did not resist arrest or attempt to run away.

Local observers believe that Kuznetsov received prison time, rather than a suspended sentence, because the media broadcast information about the case. Procurator Mikhail Alyaev requested a sentence of 5.5 years and said that he would appeal the 3.5 year sentence as too lenient. The defendant's lawyer Ravil Khasanov, on the contrary, considers the sentence too harsh. He claimed that there were a number of mitigating circumstances, such as the young age of the defendant, his previous good record, a young child at home, and the decision of most of the victims not to seek material damages. Initially, Kuznetsov offered each of the victims 3,000 rubles, but after the case received extensive media attention, the compensation rose to 10,000. Only three actually received this money.

Since Kuznetsov admitted his guilt, he had the right to avoid the questioning of witnesses and victims at the trial. Most likely he would have received a suspended sentence if the trial had proceeded with such testimony. However, on the advice of Human Rights Defense Group of Ulyanovsk Oblast, the victims sought a normal trial. According to the head of this group, Dmitrii Gavrilov, public opinion influenced the judge in setting the punishment. The judge noted that Kuznetsov had violated the constitutional rights of the victims and hurt the image of the law enforcement agencies in the eyes of society. Gavrilov said that the "main thing was to show people that it was realistic to fight against tyranny in the law enforcement agencies."

Victims' lawyer Tulkin Utambaev asked the court to sanction the police leadership as well. The human rights defenders claim that the leadership bears as much responsibility for the events as Kuznetsov. While Kuznetsov was beating the men, the other officers watched and did not intervene. When giving evidence, they said that they did not see anything. Some of the inspectors investigating the case apparently asked the

teenagers to sign statements saying that they did not have any claims against Kuznetsov. Kuznetsov left the police force a week after the incident "at his own request."

During the course of 2005, the oblast procurator filed 67 criminal cases against members of the law enforcement agencies and in 57 of the cases, the crimes were connected to their official duties: including taking bribes, 7; illegal forms of investigation, 10; and covering up a crime, 35. During the investigation, the procurator found 2,350 crimes that had been excluded from official statistics and overturned more than 2,000 instances of illegal closing of criminal cases. - Sergei Gogin in Ulyanovsk

DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY

FAR EAST ENVOY CALLS FOR 18 MILLION NEW SETTLERS. The Russian Far East should be the recipient of a massive wave of new migrants, according to plans now being developed by demographic experts. Such plans have long been discussed in Russia and the latest person to take up the call is presidential envoy to the Far East Kamil Iskhakov, the former mayor of Tatarstan's capital city Kazan, who was recently appointed to replace Konstantin Pulikovskii as envoy. He said that it was necessary to bring in 18 million settlers to occupy the Russian territory bordering China. Iskhakov argued that it was necessary to create conditions so that the migrants came to the area voluntarily and that the state did not plan to use force. He said that the settlers could be from central Russia, ethnic Russians from the rest of the former Soviet Union, or residents of neighboring countries. These methods were necessary to improve the local economy and preserve the Far East as Russian territory.

Russia has long been worried about the consequences of a shrinking population. According to UN estimates, by 2050, the country's population could shrink from its current 143 million to 113 million. Some estimates take the figure as low as 96 million. The Far East faces particular troubles. During the last 15 years, the region lost almost 1.5 million people, representing more than 14 percent of the population. By 2015, the population could drop to 4.5 million. Some observers believe that under those conditions, Russia would lose control over this territory because there simply would not be enough Russians living there.

Iskhakov recently became the deputy head of a presidential administration working group whose goal is to develop a state program on providing aid to voluntary migrants seeking to move to Russia from other countries in the former Soviet Union. Iskhakov has a strong personal interest in the success of such efforts because making significant headway could easily boost him to a prominent new position in the Kremlin.

Russia already has some experience providing incentives to migrants willing to go to the Far East. At the end of the 1960s, the Soviet government provided large rewards for migrants and even paid for their travel. In the pre-revolutionary Russian empire, Petr Stolypin provided similar benefits at the end of the 19th century. It is not clear what would entice people to move today: in the Far East there are few jobs, a poor climate, and the lowest standard of living in the country.

Vladivostok Economist Aleksandr Latkin argues that it will not be simple to attract 18 million new migrants. He noted that from 1936 to the start of the war, Stalin only resettled 635,000 people in the region. These were people who were recruited for fishing enterprises and Komsomol construction sites and the figure does not include those

sent to prison camps in the area. Obstacles for migrants today include a local 18 percent unemployment rate and high airfares that essentially cut the region off from Moscow and other parts of the world for would-be travelers who lack such means. At a minimum, the state must give residents and businesses economic incentives to live and work in the region, Latkin argued. So far, the governors of the far eastern regions are not developing plans for attracting migrants.

Other figures are also alarming. The birthrate in the Far East has dropped significantly in the last 10 years, falling from 14.6 for 1,000 residents in 1989 to 8.4 in 2004. Currently, the birthrate, at 1.3 births per woman, is half of what is necessary simply to replace the population. Even Primorskii Krai, the richest region in the area, continues to lose population. Over the last 15 years, the population fell from 2.6 million to 2.0 million at the beginning of 2006.

Many in the Far East assume that they will soon share their territory with the Chinese and more and more young people are learning Chinese. Many locals also believe that Moscow cares little about developing the region. Recently the Ministry for Economic Development agreed to set up special tourist economic zones in Southern Russia and near Lake Baikal, but not in the Far East. Economically, the Far East is increasingly oriented toward China's Manchuria, South Korea, and Japan. - Oleg Ssylka in Vladivostok

LANGUAGE POLICY

MORDOVA GROUP PROTESTS FALSIFIED NEWS STORY. The Mordovan group Foundation for Saving the Erzyan Language has protested against a 7 March report from the Regnum news agency, reprinted in the local Stolitsa S newspaper, which claims that the Finno-Ugric languages are not threatened. The original article was entitled "Danish human rights organization did not find that the authorities have prejudiced relations toward Finno-Ugric peoples" (<http://www.regnum.ru/news602033.html>). The story claimed that the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) conducted a study of the authorities' relations toward the Finno-Ugric peoples and did not find anything amiss. The report claimed that while there were individual problems in Mordova and Marii El, monitoring of the situation showed that the violations were not systematic. The report also claimed that the Danish organization claimed that the minority ethnic groups lived at the same level as other members of the population.

This report was reprinted in the popular Saransk newspaper Stolitsa S with commentary that the Mordovan national organizations were baselessly trying to create a scandal around the situation of Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia.

The Foundation for Saving the Erzyan Language asked the Information Centre For Finno-Ugric Peoples for an explanation. The reply was a complete rejection of the Regnum material (<http://www.suri.ee/press/Eng2006/060313eng.html>). The Regnum report claimed that the IWGIA material had been ordered by Katrin Saks, a member of the Estonian parliament. Saks denied ever having ordered the material. The parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe requested Saks to make a report on the status of the Finno-Ugric people in Russia. She has yet to speak out publicly on the findings of her study.

Grigorii Musalev, head of the Foundation, charged that the material published by Regnum actually came from the Mordovan authorities. He claimed that they sought to

present the situation with the Finno-Ugric people in the region better than it was in fact. Musalev claims that in fact the authorities' attention to these issues is "catastrophically low." He complained that there are no more middle schools in Mordva that teach the Erzya and Moksha languages. Moreover, funding for the publication of two newspapers and books in these languages has been cut. The state also does not provide money to celebrate holidays for these groups, nor does it allow independent groups to mark these occasions.

Musalev claims that the federal nationalities policy could lead to the disappearance of Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia. Currently, the Mordva, Komi, Mari, and Udmurt peoples are losing the ability to speak their own languages. Moreover, he complained that thanks to current migration processes, Russian speakers are moving into territories traditionally occupied by the Finno-Ugric peoples. - Igor Telin in Saransk

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The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) is the first center in the United States devoted to teaching, research, training, and policy advice in transnational crime, corruption and terrorism. Originally founded in 1995 with seed money from the MacArthur Foundation and funded by the United States Government and private foundations, TraCCC's basic goal is to better understand the causes and scope of transnational crime and corruption and to propose well-grounded policy. Much of our work to date has focused on the analysis of transnational crime and corruption in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In achieving our goals, we work with the public, media, law enforcement, policymaking, legislative, judicial, academic and business communities. To undertake this kind of collaborative work, we have partnered with the

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COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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CENTER-PERIPHERY RELATIONS

PUTIN REJECTS ADEGEYA LEADER'S RESIGNATION. On 17 April Adegeya President Khazret Sovmen tendered his resignation to President Vladimir Putin. Putin refused to accept the gesture and proposed that Sovmen continue in office until February 2007, when his elected term runs out.

Sovmen said that he offered to resign as a protest against pressure from Presidential Envoy Dmitrii Kozak, who was pushing for the merger of Adygeya with Krasnodar Krai. Ultimately, Sovmen seems to have emerged as the victor and Kozak the loser. The Adygeya president will not only stay in his position, but Putin himself told him that he will not seek the merger of the two regions "now or in the future." As frequently happens for federal bureaucrats working in the Caucasus, Kozak's reputation fell victim to the interests of the regional leaders.

Most likely, the Kremlin favored Sovmen over Kozak because the presidential administration was concerned about the threats posed by the Cherkess Congress and the Adyge Khase, which are active and vocal Adyge nationalist organizations. The leaders of these organizations actively supported Sovmen. They gave dozens of interviews to Russian and foreign media in which they asserted that if Adygeya merged with

Krasnodar Krai, there would inevitably be a "war of national liberation," "unpredictable consequences," and "terrorist acts." Even though only 3-4 people were making these statements, the Russian media seemed to be filled with these warnings.

Beyond the statements of the nationalists, the republican authorities organized massive demonstrations against the merger. They brought people onto the streets partly by threatening to take their jobs. Teachers brought their students. Orators addressing the crowds called for "defending Sovmen and the republic."

In Rostov, Kozak said that no one in the Kremlin is planning to push through the merger. But he warned that the presidential envoy's office would "correct" Sovmen in case he took any destructive steps (*Kommersant*, 21 April).

The Russian media's picture of Sovmen as a rational leader trying to preserve the republic and Adyg statehood is not correct. In fact, Sovmen is given to unusual and hard to explain actions. He frequently attacks federal officials in an unprovoked manner. For example, in the first days of his presidency, he derided then presidential envoy Viktor Kazantsev as a "mailman." He also put the next envoy, Vladimir Yakovlev, in difficult position when he told him that his information about the republic was incorrect and that Adygeya had its "own statistics." He frequently criticizes all the law enforcement agencies, accusing them of being totally corrupt and providing cover for bandits.

During his tenure, he frequently threatened to resign, telling republican legislators that "I am quitting because they don't let me work and I am not accomplishing anything." But he did not leave. Rumors of his resignation frequently circulated in the republic and eventually people stopped paying attention. - Oleg Tsvetkov in Maikop

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MAYORS SEEK TO PROTECT POWERS FROM GOVERNORS. At the beginning of April, a group of pro-Kremlin United Russia Duma deputies proposed legislation making it possible to transfer power from the mayors of regional capital cities to corresponding governors. The mayors are seeking to block this move, claiming that it is an attack on their power and a violation of the European Charter on Local Government. They are preparing a united front to ask President Putin to veto such a bill if it reaches his desk. The legislators behind the idea are Vladimir Mokryi, Vladimir Zhidkikh, and Aleksei Ogon'kov and their proposals would modify Russia's two main laws on local government.

The proposal would give the regional governments the right to take specific powers from the regional capital cities in order to "ensure the unity of their life support systems, communications, and other infrastructure." The transfer of power would take place if the regional parliament passed a law "temporarily" depriving the mayor of such important functions as providing heat, gas, and electricity to the city, removing garbage, building and maintaining roads and bridges, and providing other transportation services. The governors could also take control of managing the city's land holdings, including setting rules for the way land is used, and then monitoring construction and land use. Administration of urban land holdings is now the most profitable, and conflict-ridden, part of running a big city in Russia. Ultimately, the regional authorities would determine how long the "temporary" transfer of power would last.

Tomsk Duma Member Vladimir Zhidkikh said that the measures were necessary to prevent crisis situations from occurring. Under current legislation, it is only possible to remove a mayor in the midst of a crisis. Zhidkikh claims that timely intervention would prevent the crisis from occurring in the first place.

Governors and regional parliamentary speakers support the bill. "Governors should have the powers to 'correct' mayors if they are not up to handling their responsibilities effectively," according to the chair of the Komi legislature Marina Istikhovskaya. Novosibirsk Governor Viktor Tolokonkii concurred, pointing out that the governor bore responsibility for everything that happened in the region.

The United Russia faction in the Duma has already reviewed the bill, as has the State Duma council. The Duma is expected to vote on it in May.

All last year, after the president replaced gubernatorial elections with appointments, politicians discussed the idea that governors should appoint mayors just as the president now appoints governors. However, critics point out that this idea contradicts the European Charter on Local Government, which Russia has signed and would represent the latest of a series of moves reducing the use of democratic methods in Russia.

This proposal seems to be an effort to abolish mayoral elections de facto without formally abandoning them. "If you want to get rid of local government and transfer power to the regional and federal levels, then you should say so directly. Instead, now we have some kind of game -- it seems to be local government, but the content is completely different," according to the chairman of the Committee on State Building and Local Government in the Kemerovo legislature Vladimir Miroshnik.

The Novosibirsk newspaper "Kontinent Sibir" argued that the real purpose of the proposals is to increase support for the pro-Kremlin United Russia party on the eve of the 2007 State Duma and 2008 presidential elections. The party leadership is not happy with its performance in the eight regional elections of 12 March 2006, in which it won first place in most elections with 30 percent of the vote. The party leaders consider this amount of support to be insufficient and are looking for ways to ensure that the mayors work harder to bring out the party vote. Tomsk Mayor Aleksandr Makarov agrees with this interpretation. In the Tomsk City Duma elections of December 2005, United Russia came in second to the Party of Pensioners. Makarov suggested that after this outcome, Tomsk Duma member Zhidkikh thought up a law to end the mayors' independence. As a result of those elections, Zhidkikh had to give up the post of leader of the Tomsk branch of United Russia.

The mayors are strongly opposed to the bill. Novosibirsk Mayor Vladimir Gorodetskii argued that the amendments contradict the very idea of the federal law which establishes local government in Russia. Tomsk Mayor Makarov expressed doubt that the governor could do a better job of running the city than the mayor.

Makarov predicts that the State Duma will adopt the law since the pro-Kremlin United Russia, which controls a solid majority of the lower chamber, is sponsoring it. He said that only the president could prevent its passage. The Association of Siberian and Far Eastern Cities, whose vice president is Makarov, is preparing an appeal to the president, seeking his veto. "If Putin does not want to spoil relations with the European Union, he cannot adopt this law." The Novosibirsk City Council appealed to Putin with a

similar request on 20 April. Now it will be up to Putin to decide how to proceed. - Dmitry Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

FOREIGN TRADE

RUSSIAN FAR EAST INCREASES TRADE. As it has in the past, the Russian Far East is exporting non-renewable resources, fish and crabs, while importing increasing supplies of used Japanese cars and Chinese food products. Almost every region in the Far East increased trade activity in 2005, with Primorskii Krai, Khabarovsk, and Sakha in the lead. With the exception of Magadan, where exports fell, all the regions increased both exports and imports. The Far East's main trading partners are China (37% of turnover), Japan (31%), and South Korea (17%). The Far East has almost no trade relations with Europe and the USA.

In 2005, the foreign trade turnover of Primorskii Krai, the area's most active region, increased 38 percent and was \$3.8 billion. Exports grew 32 percent over the previous year and comprised \$1.4 billion. Traditionally, Primorskii Krai exports either directly, or in transit from other regions, seafood, lead ore and concentrates, zinc, wolfram, timber, wood products, coal, and other products. Imports also increased 42 percent over the course of the year, reaching \$2.4 billion. Imports directly to Primorskii Krai and for transit through the region were used cars and equipment, food-stuffs, clothing, material, shoes, chemicals, and rubber.

Little has changed in the make-up of Primorskii Krai's exports, according to an analysis in the Far Eastern economic weekly *Zolotoi rog*. Most of the exports are raw materials and goods exported from other regions. Among them are coal from Sakha, and ferrous metals, rolled iron, oil, and petroleum products from Siberia.

Among the most visible trends in 2005 were the increased exports of fish and crabs, increasing 30 percent to \$319 million. Korea is the largest importer of Far Eastern sea food, taking 40 percent or 98,000 tons for \$129.5 million. China is in second place with 67.7 tons for \$70 million. Germany is in third place, with 17,000 tons for \$33.45 million. These statistics most likely do not reflect the current situation since only the Korean customs service reflects the true level of imports there. Tens of thousands of tons of seafood enter Japan and China illegally. According to official statistics, fisherman send no more than 10,000 tons of seafood to Japan, a figure that does not reflect the true nature of the size of the trade.

Another major Far Eastern export is timber. Typically, such exports are round logs that have not been processed and usually they are sent to China, with a smaller amount going to Japan. In this sphere, there are only small changes from last year. Far Easterners have begun sending China a small amount of wood products for kitchens and wooden statues to the USA.

During 2005, Far Eastern textile exports to the US dropped by 50 percent. Most of these factories, which had South Korean investment, were concentrated in Primorskii Krai. However, due to changes in Russian law, most of these factories were closed. Therefore, last year the krai only exported 2.4 million men's shirts.

There were also numerous exotic exports. Last year, Primorskii Krai officially exported 6 Himalayan mice to South Korea for \$30,000. China imported 7,000 tons of pine nuts. Taiwan bought 17 tons of horns and hooves. There is little demand for Russian

vodka exports from the krai, with only small amounts going to China, South Korea, and the US. - Oleg Ssylka in Vladivostok

PROPERTY BATTLES

REGIONAL OFFICIALS SEEK TO CONTROL FACTORY. In March a large scandal began brewing in Bashkortostan when the regional authorities began the latest attempt to take control over a large business. This time the conflict focused on the Large Panel Home Construction company (KPD), one of the republic's leading firms for building housing and producing construction materials. Now Petrotek, one of the most powerful Bashkortostani financial groups, is trying to take over this company. The main backers of Petrotek are two deputy republican prime ministers: Albert Kharisov, Bashkortostan's representative in Moscow, and Khamit Mavliyarov, who is in charge of the republic's construction sector. Kharisov's brother heads the Petrotek-management company, which is seeking to buy KPD's stock. However, current KPD General Director Rashit Mamleev opposes the takeover. He is a powerful man in the region with considerable political influence, serving as a member of the presidential council, in the regional parliament, and as the head of Bashkortostan's Union of Builders. He has headed KPD for more than 20 years.

The battle began in the beginning of March when Deputy Prime Minister Mavliyarov gathered some of the board of directors from KPD to express no confidence in Mamleev and remove him as general director. The group sought to appoint as the new director Rustem Saidashev, a young businessman who owns another large construction company, Stroimekhanizatsiya, and has close ties to the Petrotek firm. Mamleev opposed his removal and appealed to the court to block the move, arguing that since he had been in the hospital shortly before the meeting, he could not attend it. He considered the decision about his firing, taken in his absence, to be illegitimate.

The two sides are already fighting in the media. Mamleev is accusing Saidashev and Petrotek of engineering a hostile takeover of his company, with the support of Deputy Prime Minister Mavliyarov. Mamleev's opponents accuse him of transferring stock in the company to firms created by his close relatives and using money from investors to build personal housing.

Ironically, just six months earlier, Saidashev, Mamleev, and Petrotek had all agreed to jointly create a company called Bashstroinvest, which should have been a managing company for KPD and Stroimekhanizatsiya, combining the assets of both companies as well as the Petrotek firm. Petrotek had also promised to invest heavily in the new firm. However, the colleagues could not agree on how to share control over the new firm, and through it, over the enterprises themselves. Each sought to have full control.

Assuming that the partners wanted to snatch KPD assets away from him, Mamleev decided to break out of the deal on creating Bashstroinvest. Without first gaining Saidashev and Petrtek's approval, he attempted to withdraw the shares that KPD had already contributed. However, his two erstwhile partners did not like this and they decided to remove Mamleev as the director of KPD. Now Mamleev claims that he is the victim of a premeditated effort to take over his factory. After he was removed as director, he tried to take back some of KPD's assets with the help of a private protection firm from

Samara. However, the new director Saidashev was able to block this effort with the help of the republican police (MVD). The head of Saidashev's security service is the former first deputy MVD minister and Deputy Prime Minister Kharisov traveled from Moscow in order to help the new director.

In this battle Saidashev has the clear upper hand since he has the support of high level bureaucrats in Bashkortostan. This is far from the only case of this type. Conflicts over property ownership occur frequently in Bashkortostan. The winners in the disputes are always the side that has the support of high-level bureaucrats, interested in gaining control over new assets.

Similar things happen in Moscow. The difference is that the federal authorities always deny that there is a political motivation behind the redistribution of large property assets, while in Bashkortostan, the authorities try to hide their concrete business interests behind moral arguments. - Igor Rabinovich in Ufa

SMALL BUSINESS

BARRIERS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP REMAIN, BUT YOUTHFUL ENERGY GIVES HOPE. The small business association OPORA held a round table in Syktyvkar on 28 March addressing the question: Is it possible to conduct business in Russia according to the law? The participants included the heads of entrepreneur associations, representatives of the law enforcement agencies, and regulatory agencies.

The businessmen argued that the local authorities are not inclined to build relations with business on a legal basis. They pointed to the example of the city of Usinsk, where the authorities declared war on kiosks involved in retail trade. The city fathers removed the kiosks and the goods inside of them with large trucks. This move was viewed as a violent and illegal seizure of property from citizens. Tensions are high in the city and many owners of small businesses are ready to start protests.

When representatives of the law enforcement agencies called on citizens to appeal for help more often, Galina Lapshina, the owner of the chain of Prodtovary stores, answered, "I think a thousand times before arguing with bureaucrats because this would affect my business. I need to deal with the authorities on a regular basis." Human rights defender Igor Sazhin proposed that business leaders should improve their image in the eyes of the population and work with the population against the tyranny of the authorities. Komi Deputy Minister of Economic Development Andrei Skripkin advised the businessmen to run for public office so that they can pass the necessary laws (*Krasnaya znamya*, 30 March). This idea would be hard to implement in practice. At the moment the "industrial party" has a plurality in the republican parliament, but is completely dependent on the republican president, who regularly blackmails the deputies with the threat of sanctions against their business.

Despite these problems, small and medium business is managing to hold its own and has clear resources for development. The most important resource is that young people are increasingly drawn to business activities. Members of the new generation are much more entrepreneurial than their parents, who are accustomed to state support and have difficulty behaving in an entrepreneurial way. Komi has the largest number of young entrepreneurs in the Northwest Federal District, since one quarter of the businessmen are under 30 years of age. The republic also has a larger share of female

entrepreneurs, 44 percent of the overall number of entrepreneurs, compared to 41 percent in general in Russia. The women are an active force in the business community and therefore, it is not by chance that the Finns are supporting the establishment of a Center for the Development of Female Entrepreneurship in Komi. The center is planning to focus much of its efforts on the development of entrepreneurship in the republic's agricultural areas (*Respublika*, 30 March).

Small business in Komi is not only maintaining its position, but is increasingly becoming aware of the need to form a wide coalition with the goal of countering the members of the regional political elite who do not want to democratize. It remains only to find a political structure which can use the political resources of small business. - Yuri Shabaev in Syktyvkar

CORRUPTION

AUTHORITIES ACCUSE KURSK FIRE SERVICE OFFICIALS OF TAKING BRIBES. The Kursk procurator on 23 April accused a Kursk official and a Moscow official of allegedly extorting bribes from businessmen in order to speed up the process of obtaining fire licenses. The authorities detained the Kursk official on 10 April while he was receiving a 50,000 ruble bribe from a local businessman.

After being detained, the Kursk official then agreed to go to Moscow for a previously arranged meeting with an official in the capital to give him 153,000 rubles. The bills were wrapped in a cellophane packet and the handover, which took place in a parked car, was filmed. Both men face potential terms of 12 years incarceration.

Every building in Russia needs a fire safety permit from the Emergencies Ministry. In some cases, local officials can provide these licenses, but when the sites are more complex, it is necessary to secure approval from the Moscow-based Scientific Research Institute of the State Fire Service, where the Moscow official worked. While it was generally assumed that paying a bribe to the fire service would speed up the process of receiving a license, this case revealed a hierarchy of bribery that involved federal and regional officials working in tandem.

The scale of the bribes ranged between 10,000 and 200,000 rubles, depending on how complex the building site was, Kursk Police Chief Viktor Bulushev told the Takt television station (<http://takt-tv.ru>). He said that the Moscow official developed the scheme and visited Kursk in September 2005 for a conference, during which he proposed that his local colleagues seek bribes from local businessmen. - Sergei Sarychev in Kursk

ISLAM IN RUSSIA

ASTRAKHAN MUSLIMS PROTEST TO SAVE MOSQUE. On 10 April about 20 Muslims and human rights defenders picketed the Russian White House demanding the revocation of a decision by the Astrakhan authorities and courts to tear down the partially constructed Mosque no. 34, on the outskirts of Astrakhan. Unexpectedly, this small event, covered by various media, aroused a powerful response in the country and abroad.

Former Astrakhan Mayor Igor Bezrukavnikov granted permission for construction of the mosque in 1998, giving the Muslims a third of a hectare of land. The Muslims also rented a similar amount of land from the city. Construction work only began in 2001,

when all of the permits and licenses were completed. Since the construction was funded by the contributions of the faithful, the mosque began to rise up very slowly. Work proceeded until September 2005, when President Putin visited Astrakhan. Then, according to Asiya Makhmutova, chair of the mosque council, while driving past the mosque, Putin allegedly said that it was not in a suitable location because it was so close to the road. The local bureaucrats promised to fix the situation and after the president's departure, filed a court case demanding the mosque's destruction (Islam.ru, 9 April; Nezavisimaya gazeta, 10 April; Volga (Astrakhan), no. 17). Makhmutova is certain that the Russian president could not have meant to give an order to tear down the mosque, he only shared his opinion on the closeness of the religious building to a heavily traveled road. However, the local authorities understood the president in their own way and devoted all of their energy to tearing down the mosque.

The number of Russian Muslims who are indignant about the decision of the city authorities to tear down the unfinished mosque is growing and they have sought to block this decision from being implemented. They have prepared documents for a complaint to the oblast court and collected about 3,000 signatures protesting the demolition. The leaders of all eleven Muslim districts in the city have appealed to Astrakhan Governor Aleksandr Zhilkin with a request not to destroy the mosque.

As the opposition grows, well-known political and religious figures have joined the protest. The issue became highly politicized. The head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Volga region Mukaddas Bibarsov appealed to Governor Zhilkin to intercede. Duma member Shamil Sultanov, coordinator of the interfaith group "Russia - Muslim World: Strategic Dialog," sent a letter to the procurator general and Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov. US Congressman Christopher Smith sent a letter to Astrakhan Mayor Sergei Bazhenov and the US embassy in Russia.

On 11 April, the day after the Moscow protest, the Russian government supported Astrakhan's Muslim society in its effort to save the mosque, according to Makhmutova. She said that in a meeting with representatives of religious associations under the auspices of the Cabinet of Ministers, the officials admitted that the religious groups will not win their case in Astrakhan Oblast, but they would have a better shot in the Supreme Court.

The position of Astrakhan Oblast mufti Nazymbed Il'yazov in the dispute has raised questions. In contrast to the eleven local religious leaders who protested the dismantling, he did not show any interest in the matter. He supported the position of the Astrakhan authorities: there are 2-3 mosques nearby and there is no need to build another one.

The outcome of the conflict remains unclear. Federal and regional human rights organizations have taken up the case, as have several investigative journalists, including Anna Politkovskaya and some reporters at Izvestiya. - Arbakhan Magomedov in Ulyanovsk

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POLITICAL OPPOSITION

BASHKIR OPPOSITION SEEKS FEDERAL INTERVENTION OVER

JOURNALIST'S ARREST. In the beginning of May, the Coordinating Council of the United Opposition of Bashkortostan appealed to President Vladimir Putin and Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, asking them to intervene after the republican authorities arrested editor of the local newspaper *Provintsial'nye vesti* Viktor Shmakov. The appeal called on the federal officials to take "immediate and extraordinary measures to restore constitutional order" in the republic. The opposition claims that the republican authorities and law enforcement agencies are involved in numerous human rights violations.

Shmakov, 64, is a fierce critic of Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rakhimov and his allies. The Bashkortostani procurator sanctioned the arrest within the framework of an investigation into the alleged distribution of extremist calls to action in the latest issue of Shmakov's newspaper.

On 27 April, the opposition planned to hold a massive demonstration in Ufa to demand the resignation of Rakhimov and an investigation into the way that his son gained control over the republic's state-owned oil companies. In advance of the demonstration, Shmakov prepared a special edition of the newspaper, which was printed outside of Bashkortostan in a print run of several hundred thousand and secretly brought into the republic.

A supplement to the paper, entitled Uprising Square, contained two articles, entitled: "Advice from the experienced: Instructions on how revolutionaries should conduct themselves during large popular actions" and "Short program of extraordinary and top-priority measures for the Bashkir revolutionary committee after successfully carrying out a revolution in the nearest 100 days." Shmakov planned to distribute this material to participants at the demonstration.

The law enforcement agencies intervened when the opposition began to summon the population to participate in the demonstration. The authorities arrested the opposition activists and confiscated all of their material. Additionally, they conducted searches of the opposition's offices and apartments. The police quickly found all copies of the newspaper and seized them. Federal Security Service agents blocked organizers of the demonstration and prevented them from guiding its course.

In Shmakov's apartment, which also serves as the editorial offices of the newspaper, the police found computer files linking him to the published material. He was arrested and the next day charged in court under suspicion of distributing extremist appeals. If found guilty of these charges, Shmakov faces five years in prison and other opposition leaders are now being called to serve as witnesses. Despite appeals from Shmakov's lawyer citing his age and heart troubles, the authorities have refused to release him on bail, claiming that he might flee.

Shmakov is a well-known opposition figure in the republic. He recently organized a branch party organization for former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov's Popular Democratic Union. Kasyanov is running for president in 2008.

Members of the opposition argue that Shmakov has committed no crime because his actions did not go beyond the bounds of constitutionally-guaranteed rights to freedom of speech and opinion. The opposition describes Shmakov's arrest as an "act of political terror" in relation to the independent media. The opposition accuses the authorities of violating the population's right to free information because they confiscated the newspapers.

Many members of the opposition believe that the federal authorities support the regional authorities in their crackdown on the republican opposition. So far, no federal official has answered the opposition's appeal. The authors of the appeal to Putin stress that they do not support extremism, instead hoping for a political dialogue within the framework of the Russian constitution and laws. - Igor Rabinovich in Ufa

UNITED RUSSIA

NOVOSIBIRSK GOVERNOR TAKES CONTROL OF PRO-KREMLIN PARTY.

The 21 April United Russia Novosibirsk party conference brought an end to the long-running conflict between the pro-Kremlin party and oblast authorities, with Governor Viktor Tolokonskii taking control of the party. Now he has removed his erstwhile opponents from the party leadership and replaced them with himself, former first deputy governor Aleksei Bespalikov, and other allies.

Tolokonskii never had good relations with United Russia and its predecessor Unity. In the 1999 and 2003 State Duma elections, the parties gained 10-12 percent less in Novosibirsk than they did on average in the rest of the country. Putin also did not do as well in the region, so it was clear that Tolokonskii was not delivering the votes that the

Kremlin wanted. Unlike many other governors, Tolokonskii has not asked Putin to appoint him to office. Under Tolokonskii's leadership, Novosibirsk has also lost out on various national competitions, such as those for a free economic zone to develop a technology park, which went to Tomsk, and a national university, now planned for Krasnoyarsk.

Relations between the governor and party were irrevocably ruined in the December 2005 elections for the Novosibirsk legislature, when the governor worked with all parties running in the race, seeking to deny a monopoly to United Russia. In response, the party sought to win a majority in the council and replace Tolokonskii by voting no confidence in him.

In order to bolster his position, Tolokonskii joined United Russia in September 2005. But he did not head the party list in the December elections. Rather, Olympic wrestling champion Aleksandr Karelin, one of the key founders of the party stood at the top of the list. While there was no open confrontation between Tolokonskii and Karelin, everyone knew that the party wanted to make Karelin governor. Sources in United Russia claimed that presidential envoy Anatolii Kvashnin was the main author of this idea. The confrontation became open two weeks before the December elections, when Kvashnin criticized the governor for trying to make his deputy Bepalikov the speaker of the oblast legislature and incurring many billions of rubles in debts for the oblast budget. Despite the opposition of the federal authorities, Bepalikov ultimately became the speaker.

After the elections, the governor's administration apparently was able to cut a deal so that it could take over the party leadership. Most likely, the governor promised a strong performance in the 2007 State Duma elections. Karelin left his party post in Novosibirsk and went to Moscow to foster the development of children's sport. Bepalikov officially took over the party at the 21 April conference. At that time, Karelin and many of his allies resigned from the regional branch of the party. Now Tolokonskii and Bepalikov will be under heavy pressure to deliver a strong showing of support for the Kremlin in the 2007 Duma and 2008 presidential elections.

Ironically, Tolokonskii's victory in taking control of the local branch of United Russia came at the same time as the party's Moscow-based leadership is trying to remove regional party branches from control by the governors. For example, the governors of Bryansk, Novgorod, and Krasnodar, who had headed their regional parties, had to leave their posts. Additionally, Tomsk Governor Viktor Kress was not able to gain the leadership of the party in his region. Having the deputy governor lead the party's regional branch is also not welcome by the Kremlin. This situation holds in 11 of Russia's 88 regions. - Dmitrii Vinogradov in Novosibirsk

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

WINE BAN COULD HELP RUSSIAN PRODUCERS. On 27 March, Russia banned wine imports from Georgia and Moldova and ordered the removal of such wines currently on store shelves. The Moscow authorities claimed that 60 percent of the production from these countries did not meet safety standards because of the presence of dangerous pesticides.

Wine is one of the main components of the economies of Georgia and Moldova and Russia has traditionally by their largest consumer. In 2005, Russia imported \$530

million worth of wine. In terms of market share, 51 percent came from Moldova, 15 percent from Bulgaria, and 12 percent from Georgia. Russia's share in the export markets of Moldova and Georgia is 80-90 percent. The ban delivered a serious blow to the economies of these countries.

Some of the suspect wine came from Georgia and Moldova, but Russian producers also prepare a large share of the counterfeit Georgian and Moldovan wine. Knowing that Georgian and Moldovan wine is very popular among Russians, since the beginning of the 1990s, transnational criminal groups have entered this form of shadow business. The most simple form of such illegal business is to make wine from cheap materials and sell it under the well-known labels. It is extremely difficult to counter the activities of these groups because they typically make the wine in mini-factories in remote locations employing illegal migrants who are not registered to work in Russia. The leaders of these criminal groups are typically located outside of Russia and the law enforcement agencies usually only arrest low-level members of the group who can easily be replaced.

Due to the high level of tensions between Russia and Georgia, some observers speculate that the Russian government might simply ban Georgian wine sales. Since these wines make up only 12 percent of the market, it would be possible to replace them with wines from other countries. Such actions against Moldova are less likely since Moldovan wine makes up a much larger share of the market.

Farmers in Krasnodar Krai are following the dispute with particular interest. During Soviet times, farmers planted more than 190 hectares of wine grapes in this area. During the last 10-15 years, these farmers could not compete with the growth of cheap exports from Georgia and Moldova or the extensive counterfeit production. Between 1991 and 2005, the size of wine production in southern Russia was cut in half. The current situation gives domestic wine growers a chance to greatly improve their position on the local market and restore their lost production.

Since the ban on Moldovan and Georgian wines came after the coldest winter Russia has faced in a long time and one that destroyed a considerable amount of the country's grape production, observers in southern Russia argue that protectionism is the main reason behind the embargo. The Russian authorities have paid considerable attention to grape production in recent years. They view it not only in economic terms, but also as an issue of national security.

Youth unemployment in the North Caucasus creates a fertile base for Islamist radicalism in Chechnya and Dagestan and many young men join the ranks of field commanders with the goal of earning money. Wine growing requires extensive labor inputs that could produce relatively good incomes for workers involved in this part of the economy. The wine-growing regions of Chechnya, especially Shelkovskoi Raion, continue to be some of the calmest parts of the republic. Here the population and local elites are interested in the stability of profitable business. In this light, developing the local economy is seen as a way to counter terrorism. This situation leads the federal authorities to invest large sums into the development of the wine business and support its further growth through administrative means, such as the embargo. - Sergei Danilcheko in Krasnodar

PROCUREMENT CORRUPTION

BUSINESSMAN/LEGISLATOR PROTESTS LACK OF COMPETITION FOR AGRICULTURE PROJECT. A scandal is brewing in Kursk over the list of companies that will be allowed to participate in implementing the national project to improve Russia's agricultural system. Putin last year announced four national projects, in agriculture, housing, health care, and education, to demonstrate concrete advances in the life of ordinary people.

At the 27 April meeting of the Kursk legislature, the deputies approved the governor's plan to create a pool of firms that could receive state funding for agricultural projects without needing to participate in competitions. Deputy Oblast Premier Aleksandr Demin explained that such a move was necessary due to economic expediency - otherwise, Kursk would not succeed in submitting an application to the agriculture ministry to receive subsidies in building livestock complexes.

Deputy Aleksandr Chetverikov spoke out against the proposal. The administration did not include his Agrokholding company in its preliminary list of firms approved for participation. This company is carrying out the largest agricultural project in the region, the goal of which is to raise one million pigs a year. The first step to raise 180,000 is already complete. Chetverikov told *Kommersant* newspaper that without holding competitions, real businesses would be "deprived of access to the 'national project'," which would be turned into a "corrupt" project (<http://www.kommersant.ru/region/vrn/>).

Just before Chetverikov gave this interview, the spokesperson for the Kursk legislature Lali Kryzhinevskaya announced in the name of Speaker Aleksandr Kichigin that Agrokholding subsequently had been included in the list of companies eligible to participate in the project. Chetverikov responded by saying that the inclusion of his firm did not change his position. He claimed that "the authorities are using their power for personal gain" and the federal funds will be siphoned off for other purposes. According to Chetverikov, the following companies had been approved to receive the funds:

- Pselskoe, apparently controlled by Kursk deputy premier Aleksei Zolotarev
- Teplo-Avangard M, controlled by Zolotarev's brother Maksim
- Nadezhda, affiliated with chairman of the oblast's road construction committee Aleksandr Polin
- Yug, controlled by the former Ukrainian deputy prime minister Vladimir Seminozhenko, who went to school with Kursk premier Aleksandr Zubarev.

Chetverikov claims that not one of the Kursk Oblast enterprises that could realistically carry out the project is on the list.

The situation surrounding these events shows that a classic corrupt model of "bureaucratic capitalism" is currently operating in the oblast. In this model, the oblast legislature plays the role of implementing the interests of the governor and his cabinet, which run counter to the commercial interests of Agrokholding. As a result, Chetverikov, who previously said that he would play the role of moderate opposition, is now sharpening his criticism and could in the future become a more serious opponent to the governor. - Sergei Sarychev in Kursk

NATIONAL BOLSHEVIK PARTY

LIMONOV'S PARTY INCREASES ACTIVITIES IN SAMARA. The Samara branch of Edward Limonov's National Bolshevik Party (NBP) conducted a number of radical protests in Samara during March and April. The Russian authorities have banned the party because of its extremist activities, which are targeted at undermining the Russian state.

In March, the party organized pickets to protest rising prices for food and housing. More than 200 party members participated in the protests, along with 1,000 Samara residents. On 1 April, 20 members of the party protested in front of the building of the Samara military commissariat. The action marked the beginning of the spring draft in Russia. One of the participants wrapped himself in paper and tried to set himself on fire, seeking a dramatic display of his objections to army service.

On 10 April a group of NBP activists captured the building of the military commissar's office in the Promyshlennii Raion of Samara. Two party members seized one of the offices and chained themselves to a safe in the office. On the roof of the building activists unfurled a banner with the slogan "Send Minister Ivanov as an ordinary soldier to Chechnya!" Then the party members blew up petards and launched fireworks. About 10 party members participated in the action and they were all arrested by the police. The party seeks to cancel Russia's draft and switch entirely to a voluntary army. The party plans more protest actions and events criticizing the authorities and President Putin, according NBP member Georgii Kvantrishvili.

"The National Bolsheviks are becoming dangerous. The actions carried out in Moscow and now Samara are characterized by extremist appeals," according to political scientist Valerii Pavlyukevich. In May 2005, a group of teenagers defiled Jewish grave markers in the Samara city cemetery. The investigation revealed that the youths were members of one of the organizations that is part of the NBP. The Samara branch of the party actively cooperates with skinhead organizations and the Union of Communist Youths of Samara. According to the human rights organization Free Society, there are more than 2,000 NBP members and skinheads in Samara today.

Additionally, for the first time, representatives of nationalist organizations are starting to appeal to the courts. On March 2, the Samara Raion court began to hear a case filed by Viktor Guzhov, the editor of the national-patriotic newspaper "I am a Russian" against the Samara Raion procurator. On 25 November 2005, the procurator issued Guzhov a warning that his newspaper included extremist material. Guzhov was warned that he might face criminal prosecution for calling for the violent overthrow of Russia's constitutional order. The procurator also charged that the newspaper contained inappropriate statements about Jews and residents of the Caucasus. Guzhov seeks to prove in court that he has a right to publish material critical of Jews and Caucasus residents. Guzhov claims that the procurator is carrying out the orders of the authorities who seek to limit the freedom of nationalists.

Samara City Duma member Sergei Arsentev argues that there should be a Civil Forum which could prohibit the actions of parties that preach nationalism and extremism. Human rights groups have sent an appeal to the members of the State Duma seeking action against the increased anti-Semitic mood in Samara, as well as the activities of the NBP and skinheads. The human rights defenders seek to strengthen monitoring of the

activities of nationalist groups in Russia and a greater effort to block their actions. -
Sergei Khazov in Samara

ROSTOV NBP STAGES PROTEST AT LOCAL SBERBANK. In Rostov-na-Donu, more than 10 members of the extremist National Bolshevik Party seized the local Sberbank office as a political protest. The party members demanded compensation be paid to Russians for the money they lost due to the introduction of economic "shock therapy" policies in the early 1990s. The NBP members also demanded an end to Russia's repayment of its foreign debt and sought to redirect the money to poor members of the population. Among their other demands were calls to provide for the well-being of citizens through the use of the gold and foreign currency reserves in the Central Bank and oil profit stabilization fund, and dropping plans to join the World Trade Organization.

At the end of their protest, the party members tried to set the bank building on fire, having warned the employees to leave the building. The police then intervened and arrested six of the party members, while the others managed to escape. The National Bolsheviks did not take any of the money or valuables held in the bank.

A local court sentenced the party members who were detained to 13 days in jail for hooliganism and holding an unauthorized demonstration. Potentially more serious charges could follow.

After the events in the bank, presidential envoy Dmitrii Kozak personally expressed his unhappiness to Governor Vladimir Chub for the inability of the local authorities to maintain order in Rostov Oblast. - Aleksandr Krasnov in Rostov-na-Donu

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POLITICAL ELITE

AGING MORDOVIAN LEADER FAILS TO PROMOTE NEW BLOOD.

Mordovia's 56-year-old minister for labor and the social security of the population Gennadii Yudakov unexpectedly died at the beginning of 2006. After two weeks, republican president Nikolai Merkushev replaced him in an even more unexpected way: appointing to the post former customs head Vladimir Kazeev, also 56, but with no experience dealing with social issues. Such horizontal moves among top-level managers are becoming a general trend in the formation of Mordovia's bureaucratic elite.

Though he seems unqualified for his new post because of his lack of experience, Kazeev's career is typical for the republic's nomenklatura: he was born and raised in the countryside, graduated from the agricultural department of Mordovia State University, worked in the Komsomol (Communist youth league), and then the party apparatus, spending some time studying at the party's Higher School. In the late 1980s, he rose to become the head of the Kochkurovskii Raion. In the 1990s, he served six years as deputy agriculture minister and from 1999 until recently, head of the republic's customs service. Nothing really qualifies him for his new position, except his long experience in the halls of power and his general managerial background. The now deceased Yudakov was a medic by profession, making his tenure in the position more comprehensible.

What explains the appointment of this person with a long bureaucratic career, but no specialized training? Saransk political scientist Aleksei Chetvergov suggests a sports analogy, arguing that the Mordovian leader lacks a "deep bench." Often the coach of a

team is required to replace one of his players who has been injured or fouled out with an illogical choice simply because he has no one else to put on the field. Thus, the republican leader had no more appropriate alternative for the social post than former head of the customs agency.

Chetvergov stresses Kazeev's service in the komsomol as a key aspect of his biography. The regional elite in Mordovia is formed by the typical Russian principle in which positions are filled not by the skill of the individual, but closeness and loyalty to the leader. Such closeness can be defined in terms of family ties, studying at the same school, or coming from the same town. For Mordovia, the main criteria is a Komsomol past. President Merkushkin worked at the head of the republican Komsomol for nearly ten years (1977-1986) and the people who served with him then became the core of his current team.

Serving in the Komsomol has benefits, according to Chetvergov, because most of the organization's leaders were generalists. However, all the people who served with Merkushkin then have aged 20 years along with him. "Now the old cadres... are blocking the arrival of fresh blood into the republic's management. In recent years, no new faces have appeared in Mordovia's regional, political, economic, or managerial systems," Chetvergov said. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that new comers will succeed in the near future.

The aging of the republic's managerial elite increasingly is becoming a problem. The average age of members in the republican legislature, executive branch, and presidential administration is 54. Yudakov's death sounds a warning about the region's entire managerial system, according to Chetvergov. Obviously none of the current top officials will remain in place forever, but it is not clear who will replace them. Currently, there is no system for preparing new managers, even as there had been during the Soviet era. Then there was a logical ladder from Komsomol to Communist to high-level post. University graduates today have no similar career ladder to climb. Young people are not promoted while older managers simply rotate horizontally among jobs. Such a policy can have a cost if incompetent people are appointed to important positions. - Igor Telin in Saransk

CENTER-PERIPHERY RELATIONS

PRESIDENTIAL VISIT DOES NOT LIFT KOMI LEADERS. Following the recent appointment of Komi Governor Vladimir Torlopov to a new term and the election of his ally Marina Istikhovskaya as the speaker of the republican parliament, Komi's political elite has sought to strengthen its hold on power. President Vladimir Putin's visit on 6 April was supposed to be the key event in this campaign.

Putin had been expected in Komi as long ago as 2001, when the republic marked its 80th anniversary. At that time there was an intense internal battle for power between former governor Yurii Spiridonov and Torlopov. Putin never made it to Komi then. Moreover, in subsequent years, few top federal leaders visited the region, allowing the critics of the republican leaders to claim that they were doing a poor job lobbying Komi's interests in the halls of the Kremlin.

Putin's April visit gave Torlopov a powerful boost as a politician, as was widely noted in the republican press. But many observers have pointed out that he did not use the visit as effectively as he could have.

Like any other politician, Torlopov should have used the president's visit to solve pressing local problems and secure additional funds from the federal treasury. Among the most important issues in Komi is moving 150,000 residents from the northern coal mining cities of Inta and Vorkuta to more southern areas better suited for human habitation. Despite its promises, the federal government has given little money for these programs and the funds that have been set aside arrive only with great delays.

But the governor did not even raise this issue. He requested money for the reconstruction of the local drama theater and the granting of federal status to the local Finno-Ugric cultural center. While he did ask for aid in paying the debts of the Inta coal company and its privatization, he placed a particular emphasis on helping the region's indigenous people. This request created some tension between Putin and Governor Torlopov. Putin spoke of the people as a political and civil category, while Torlopov used ethnic terms. Thus the governor ended up in ideological opposition to the president who is trying to strengthen the Russian nation in broad terms as a form of civil society. Additionally, Torlopov essentially ignored the three quarters of the area's residents who are not members of the indigenous group. The Kremlin could not help but notice that the terms of Torlopov's approach were those of an ethnic entrepreneur, and that his approach differed considerably from the president's effort to build a political nation.

Komi faces additional problems in its relations with the federal government, particularly in terms of the new campaign against corruption starting in the country. While there are many reasons for such an effort now, the most obvious is the need to increase the authority of the incumbent party in the run up to the 2007 parliamentary and 2008 presidential elections. Of course, a real campaign against corruption cannot be conducted episodically and should make clear that any and every official cannot assume that they are above the law.

The first "victim" of this campaign in Komi was Deputy Minister of Industry and Energy Viktor Stotskii, whom the republican procurator arrested on charges of receiving a \$1,800 bribe from a businessman (*Molodozh severa*, 20 April). Investigators have reason to believe that the businessman also gave bribes to other officials and are pursuing these leads (*Zyryanskaya zhizn*, 1 May).

Most likely, the newly appointed republican procurator Aleksandr Shuklin will go after other officials. In a recent speech, republican legislator Lyudmila Zavyalova said that in a private conversation with her, Shuklin said that corruption was deeply entrenched in the republic and to expect additional highly visible cases. Of course, these cases will necessarily hurt the local branch of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party because members of this party hold all the key posts in the executive and legislative branches. Accusations of corruption would definitely damage the authority of the local political establishment, but probably would not tarnish the image of the federal authorities in the region. The main question is how far the anti-corruption campaign will go. - Yuri Spiridonov in Syktyvkar

PRESIDENT REAPPOINTS ULYANOVSK GOVERNOR... On 28 March the members of the Ulyanovsk legislature confirmed President Putin's appointment of Sergei

Morozov as governor. Of 27 deputies present, 21 supported Morozov, 4 voted against, and 2 ballots were disqualified.

The six legislators who denied their support to Morozov must have come as a surprise. Since he was elected to the post in December 2004, there has not been much opposition to Morozov in the oblast. Moreover, the vast majority of the legislators belong to the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, as does Morozov. Since Putin began appointing governors in the beginning of 2005, no regional parliament has opposed his nomination, particularly since doing so would allow the president to disband that legislature.

Having first become governor at the end of 2004, Morozov was one of the last directly elected regional executives in Russia. Morozov hesitated in asking Putin for his formal blessing because he was not sure if the president would back him. Morozov won office with the financial support of the Samara-based SOK group of companies, whose managers still exercise considerable influence over regional politics. In 2005 SOK's plans to take a controlling stake in the giant automobile manufacturer AvtoVAZ ran afoul of the Kremlin's own plans for the factory, which quickly transferred the automaker under the control of the state-owned arms export monopolist Rosoboroneksport.

Most likely, the Kremlin told Morozov that he cannot work in the interests of the Kremlin and the SOK group and he quickly moved to demonstrate that SOK's influence in the region was on the wane. Shortly after winning the president's support, Morozov told journalists that he would function as head of his own cabinet instead of appointing a regional prime minister, an idea backed by Deputy Governor Aleksandr Bolshakov, who represents SOK's interests.

Theoretically Morozov could have worked until the end of his term without winning Putin's blessing. But since members of the federal government were generally cold to him, Morozov could not put off the question much longer. In the conditions of Putin's hierarchy of power, Morozov would have had difficulty requesting federal funds from Putin's ministers without first having obtained the presidential stamp of approval. - Sergei Gogin in Ulyanovsk

...WHO THEN SHARPLY CRITICIZES PRO-KREMLIN PARTY. Ulyanovsk Governor Sergei Morozov delivered a harsh critique of his fellow party members in the pro-Kremlin United Russia party at its 29 April regional party conference. Morozov is a member of the party's political council. The governor charged that the party lacked the desire and the ability to compete for votes in the upcoming 2007 State Duma and 2008 presidential elections. The governor's address seemingly lifted a taboo on criticizing the party in the region.

If President Vladimir Putin keeps his word and does not run for a third term, then the United Russia party will lose its main slogan "We are the party of Putin." In that situation, the party would have little to distinguish it from the other parties competing, including Rodina, the Communists, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, and the Party of Pensioners, among others. The party has so far been able to win support based on the popularity of the president even though it lacks an original program. United Russia could end up like the Communists in their period of decline, when they declared their leading role, but lacked any real authority. Rather than demonstrating leadership through its deeds, the party has mainly engaged in "empty demagoguery," according to Morozov.

The governor demonstrated that the regional party branch has failed to implement almost all of the resolutions from its previous party conference. The last conference had set the goal of recruiting three percent of oblast voters to the party ranks, but today's membership is only about 1 percent of voters, and there are primary party organizations only in one-sixth of the region's precincts. In the 2005 local government elections, only one third of the winners represented the party.

The United Russia legislators in the regional parliament lack party discipline since they rarely vote as a coherent bloc on significant bills. Many members of the party's political council skipped numerous meetings over the last year, but faced no sanctions.

Morozov was particularly critical of regional party leader Aleksandr Frolov, noting that Frolov failed to recruit candidates for the repeat elections to the oblast legislature and City Duma on 12 March, so there were no United Russia candidates on the ballot. Moreover, the party council has never spoken out about problems dealing with the housing sector, transportation, crime, and drug use among the population.

Morozov complained that when he called on all parties to propose candidates for his cabinet, only United Russia did not send a list of resumes. The party has also failed to sign an agreement with the governor as required by its previous gathering. Thanks to this criticism, party leader Frolov almost failed to hang on to his seat in the political council, eking out a victory with a 88-74 vote.

Given these problems, it is obvious why the party is not popular in the region. Recent polls show that only 28 percent of oblast residents support the party and that it only has 22 percent support in the city of Ulyanovsk. Even the party members do not like to make their affiliation to the party public -- often they run as self-nominated candidates even though they have won the party's endorsement.

United Russia has a negative image since it is known as the "party of bureaucrats." In fact, this label reflects reality since few ordinary citizens were at the party conference. Most attendees were legislators, party bosses, bureaucrats, and economic managers.

Why did Morozov decide for the first time to criticize the party so harshly? First, he was recently appointed governor by the president, so he is not reliant on party support. Second, federal party leaders likely encouraged him to act since they realize that a party with a poor image among the voters is not likely to do well in the elections. Finally, Morozov has some interest in the party's success since almost all members of the oblast administration are formally members of the party. In fact, today Ulyanovsk largely has a "one-party" government since the governor, Ulyanovsk mayor, and a majority of ministers and regional legislators are in the party. The party will likely bear responsibility for the success or failure of the governor's policies. - Sergei Gogin in Ulyanovsk

ISLAM IN RUSSIA

PERM AUTHORITIES BACK COMPLIANT MUFTI. In April, the Perm authorities threw their support behind the region's former mufti Mukhammedgali Khuzin, providing him with the opportunity to build a new mosque.

In February, the head of the Central Spiritual Department for Muslims Talgat Tadzhtudin fired Khuzin from his post as chairman of the Regional Spiritual Department for Muslims of Perm Krai (see RRR, 27 March). As a result, local Muslims refused to

allow Khuzin to enter the region's existing mosque. Khuzin's dismissal was the result of an internal conflict within the Central Spiritual Department for Muslims in which the young mufti Khuzin sought to take over the leadership of the organization. Tazhutdin blocked his initiative and fired Khuzin. Khuzin, however, refused to accept this demotion and began to conduct himself as an independent Muslim leader.

Shortly after his firing, Khuzin gained the support of the Perm regional authorities. At the end of March, they gave him a plot of land for the construction of another mosque in the region. The decision was taken by acting Perm mayor Arkadii Kats and Deputy Governor Nikolai Yashin.

Khuzin has gained fame as an Islamic leader willing to support the authorities' "battle against wahhabism." Apparently, the Russian authorities see advantages in supporting such activists, perhaps because by fostering battles between Islamic leaders, it is easier for them to carry out a policy of "divide and conquer" in relation to Islamic institutions.

The new mosque will be built on a 4,800 square meter plot at 74 Gagarin Boulevard. Construction is expected to cost \$1.5 million with support coming from the Perm branch of the Lukoil company. This episode suggests that it is easy for the authorities and big business groups to find money to support loyal religious institutions. At the same time, Russian education and science are under financed. - Arbakhan Magomedov in Ulyanovsk

LAW AND SOCIETY

BASHKORTOSTAN COURT MOVES SLOWLY IN POLICE VIOLENCE CASE.

Following a violent crackdown by the police in the Bashkortostani city of Blagoveshchensk in December 2004, President Vladimir Putin appointed Sergei Khurtin as the new procurator in the republic. Despite extensive resistance by the local authorities, in April 2005, Khurtin filed a court case accusing several police officers of exceeding their authority in administering the violence. Among those facing charges, were Blagoveshchensk police chief Ildar Ramazanov and the deputy commander of a company in the republic's OMON special police Oleg Sokolov (for earlier reports, see RRR, 24 February and 27 December 2005).

However, the court process has moved forward extremely slowly. The lawyers of the accused have skipped court hearings claiming to be extremely busy with other cases, after which the judge has agreed to postponing the sessions despite the procurator's protests. Frequently one lawyer for the 8 defendants was absent, blocking progress in the trial. Additionally, the defendants began changing their lawyers, causing further delays as the new lawyers had to study the materials of the case in order to prepare themselves to participate. But the greatest problem, one that threatens the continuation of the case, is that many of the victims of the violence have decided not to present evidence in court, even though earlier they said that they were ready to testify. So far only 22 witnesses have testified out of 300 victims who had originally agreed to do so. According to human rights defenders monitoring the case, many of the witness have withdrawn under pressure from the city authorities. Those who agree not to testify are allegedly being offered work, a powerful incentive in a city with chronic high unemployment among the youth. Others

are threatened with the loss of their job. Such accusations, however, are extremely hard to document.

Several witnesses have testified in court that the local police have pressured them not to testify against the police defendants in the case. The lawyers of these witnesses have asked that the court remove the defendants from their police positions. Even though they are on trial, the defendants continue to hold important positions in the city police force. According to the witnesses' lawyers, the defendants are using their positions to organize their colleagues to protect them from prosecution. However, the defendants and their lawyers rejected these charges and the court sided with them, allowing the defendants to continue to work in the Blagoveshchensk police force.

At the beginning of March, Judge Tatyana Pisareva unexpectedly interrupted the case, returned all the material to the procurator, and ordered the preparation of separate cases against Ramazanov and Sokolov. The judge said that these two individuals, in contrast to the other accused police, were not directly involved in the violence. Observers say that the judge is doing everything possible to prevent the prosecution of these highly placed police officials who allegedly played a role in carrying out the operation that led to so much violence.

Immediately after the judge made this demand, Procurator Khurtin said that "interested parties" were pressuring the procurator to back away from the prosecutions. He accused the police of continuing to violate citizens' rights in the city, pointing out that he had filed additional cases and sent a letter to the republican police chief, requesting that he take action to end the violations and fire the city's police chief Ramazanov. However, Khurtin did not name exactly who is putting pressure on him. The position of the authorities is apparently obvious from the actions of the local branch of the Regnum news agency, which initially distributed a report about Khurtin's statement and then annulled it.

With this statement, the procurator is the only official institution trying to block the tyranny of the authoritarian regime in Bashkortostan. Therefore is completely understandable why the procurator is replaced every one or two years, while the republican police chief has been in his post for ten years. - Igor Rabinovich in Ufa

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American University and the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center

In a letter to Virginia Governor Robert Brooke, George Washington explained his idea for a great "national university" to be established in the nation's capital city. Washington did not see this university in his lifetime, but approximately one hundred years later, in

1893, Washington's dream was realized when American University (AU) was chartered by an Act of the United States Congress. Through the vision of Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst, the idea of a national university, an idea born with the nation itself, came into being. Today AU is an independent university with more than 11,000 students from all 50 states and nearly 150 foreign countries enrolled in undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and professional degree programs.

The Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) is the first center in the United States devoted to teaching, research, training, and policy advice in transnational crime, corruption and terrorism. Originally founded in 1995 with seed money from the MacArthur Foundation and funded by the United States Government and private foundations, TraCCC's basic goal is to better understand the causes and scope of transnational crime and corruption and to propose well-grounded policy. Much of our work to date has focused on the analysis of transnational crime and corruption in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In achieving our goals, we work with the public, media, law enforcement, policymaking, legislative, judicial, academic and business communities. To undertake this kind of collaborative work, we have partnered with the best scholars and practitioners in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia through multidisciplinary research centers.

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS)

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zürich, according to its German acronym) was founded by the Swiss government in 1854 as a polytechnic and opened its doors in Zurich in 1855. Until 1969 it was the only national university in Switzerland. Today it is part of the ETH domain, which is made up of the two universities in Zurich and Lausanne (the EPFL) and four national research institutes. ETH Zurich itself comprises 83 institutes and laboratories, 330 professorships, and about 840 lecturers who fulfill teaching obligations and conduct research. A staff of more than 7,500 - 25 percent of whom are women - work in teaching, research, and administration. ETH Zurich currently has 11,700 registered students.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) was founded in 1986 and specializes in the field of national and international security studies. It undertakes research in the fields of transatlantic relations, US and Russian foreign and security policy, the European security architecture, and Swiss domestic and foreign policy. The CSS runs a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army. It also offers specialized courses to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students and is actively involved in the development of new study programs.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN). The ISN is a central component of Switzerland's peace promotion program and a leading free public service that provides a wide range of high-quality products and resources to encourage the exchange of information among international relations and security professionals worldwide.

The CSS further runs the Comprehensive Risk Analysis and Management Network (CRN), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP).

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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