

**FEDERATION OF
JEWISH COMMUNITIES
OF RUSSIA**

**ANTI-SEMITISM IN RUSSIA
(Analysis of trends for the year 2002)**

This year the following trends have been especially prominent in the overall pattern of anti-Semitism in Russia and the fight against it. Most importantly, the official domestic and foreign policies of the Russian government agencies and legislative bodies exhibit no signs of explicit or latent anti-Semitism. Some government officials have made statements directed against Jews but these reflected only the private views of these officials and not the policies of the relevant government bodies.

Moreover, the executive and legislative bodies have made a number of steps aimed at enhancing the fight against anti-Semitism. The most significant step was the promulgation of the law "On controlling the extremist activities" though its passage in the parliament had been blocked by the left-wing factions for a long time.

On the other hand, the everyday or "street" anti-Semitism is still a significant problem in Russia. If the Russian anti-Semitism is compared, for instance, to the French anti-Semitism which is closely associated with anti-Israeli attitudes one can see that in Russia the Israeli factor does not make any significant contribution to the driving motives of the Russian anti-Semites. The consequences of the anti-Israeli sentiments and actions in France and other European countries are much more severe than any such effects in Russia.

The positive aspects of the situation might be attributed largely to the even-handed attitude of the Russian authorities to Jews and its reasonable attitude towards Israel which is definitely unbiased in contrast to the attitudes exhibited in many EU countries. In addition, the two-year xenophobia monitoring conducted by the Information Analysis Centre of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (FEOR) has demonstrated that the anti-Semitic manifestations in Russia were seasonal in character. In summer their intensity grows markedly while in winter it declines revealing that they are random in nature. In summer young people in Russia, in particular students have more leisure time and the incidence of hooliganism, in general, including the violence against Jews but not only them, increases throughout Russia.

These phenomena are undermining the internal stability in the country and threatening the wellbeing of all Russian citizens. They reveal a deep-seated moral malaise prevailing in a significant section of the Russian society and contribute to an overall growth in public xenophobia and intolerance.

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The Russian law-enforcement agencies have initiated various actions aimed at combating public manifestations of anti-Semitism. The Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation has established the Department for Fighting Extremism which is given the mission to respond urgently to the extremist acts reported by the Jewish and other religious communities in Russia.

Berl Lazar, the Chief Rabbi of Russia, has suggested that the Russian government must establish a special law-and-order agency for combating anti-Semitism. At a meeting with the Deputy Interior Minister V. Vasilyev in summer of 2002 Berl Lazar said that "if such an agency is established the Anti-Semitism phenomenon can be crushed". He deplored the fact that the police have failed to apprehend the perpetrators of the recent violent anti-Semitic acts, including bomb explosions in Vladivostok, near Kaliningrad, and at the Kievskoe highway near Moscow.

Some officials of the Ministry of the Interior believe that recent public postings of anti-Semitic inscriptions or signs over hidden real or mock explosive devices were merely isolated acts of random hooliganism, rather than manifestations of a dangerous social trend. A statement to that effect was made at a press-conference by Yuri Demidov, the first deputy head of the Organized Crime Department of the Ministry of the Interior. He said that only the Kievskoe highway bomb explosion could be classified as a crime aimed at promoting ethnic conflict. He added that the police investigators continued to look for witnesses of the crime and gather evidence. In his opinion, all other cases when anti-Semitic signs were posted next to hidden explosive charges or bomb mock-ups could not be grouped together and there were no reasons to say that "all of them had common anti-Semitic motivation". For instance, Yu. Demidov claimed that the bomb explosion near Kaliningrad was associated with a criminal quarrel over property rights, while the anti-Semitic sign at the explosive device in the Kemerovo region was posted by a teenager "who merely wanted his village to be on TV news programme".

Regardless of the official position of record, there is no sufficient evidence of a satisfactory and adequate government action in the recent period to combat the not-infrequent ethnic hatred offences. The recently promulgated law "On controlling the extremist activities" is not sufficiently effective as it is very rarely invoked by the authorities as well as the articles of the Criminal Code specifying the punishment for inciting ethnic and racial hatred.

The authorities in the Russian regions were more active in 2002 in fighting anti-Semitism. For example, the Yekaterinburg Public Prosecutor's office started criminal proceedings against the regional diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church for publication and dissemination of the anti-Semitic materials. The activists of the local ethnic minorities, including Jewish groups, were successful in pressuring the authorities into starting the criminal proceedings for incitement of ethnic strife and anti-Semitism, in particular.

Edward Rossel, the Yekaterinburg region governor, said in an interview to the "Regional Newspaper" on March 7, 2002, that he approved plans for building a synagogue as "we have people of many faiths living in the region including 40 000 Jews. It will be a fantastic synagogue, it will have a wonderful school, a modern

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sports centre, a cafeteria catering to the needy community members. The people appreciate our efforts and we do not have any serious ethnic and inter-faith conflicts.”

In the spring and summer of 2002 the law-enforcement bodies in Moscow, Omsk, Voronezh and some other Russian cities instituted effective actions against the youth groups notorious for their anti-Semitic rhetoric and deeds, primarily, the so-called skinhead gangs.

On August 26, 2002 the FEOR Information Analysis Centre conducted a round-table meeting “Anti-Semitism of the Younger Generation” discussing the summer wave of vandalism and terrorist acts with anti-Semitic placards. The meeting was attended by the members of the Youth Human Rights movement from Germany, the Moscow Human-Rights Bureau, and the Moscow Helsinki Group.

S. Lemeshko reported at the meeting that the Jewish communities of Russia planned to be actively involved in gathering information on the state of ethnic relations in Russia. Community members and activists will analyze the leaflets, pamphlets, notices, placards, etc. distributed in their neighbourhoods; they will also monitor publications in the local and regional media and identify new media exhibiting extremist tendencies because such “publication activities” ultimately incite ethnic aggression, vandalism, and violence.

Anti-Semitic publications in the media

The wide availability of the extremist, in particular, anti-Semitic literature was a serious hazard in the period just before the promulgation of the law “On controlling the extremist activities”. The Moscow Police Department has established the fact that the neo-Nazi literature is published primarily in Moscow, Novosibirsk, Krasnodar and Volgograd.

For instance, the neo-Nazi People’s National Party published the newspaper “Russia’s Era” focused on anti-Semitic propaganda which was freely distributed in central Moscow (Vladimir Popov is on record as its publisher and chief editor and Andrey S. Sokolov as its executive secretary). Since the law “On controlling the extremist activities” has been promulgated such publication activities have been markedly reduced. However, anti-Semitic publications can appear even in legitimate media.

The quasi-Nazi RNE organization has been given an official license to start a newspaper named “For the Russian People” in Saint-Petersburg. The paper opened with a report on the establishment of a national chauvinist organization saying that “it is waging a struggle for ethnic Russia against the internationalized kike-dominated Russia possessed by demons.”

For many years the square at the entrance to the former Lenin Museum next door to the Kremlin was packed with activists selling Nazi and neo-Nazi publications or giving them away for free. A wide variety of such books and pamphlets included modern reprints of the classic anti-Semitic texts that first appeared in Russia in late

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19th and early 20th century and contributions prepared by the contemporary right-wing and nationalist radicals such as the RNE leader A. Barkashov. Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was not displayed openly but those who asked for it could easily buy it. The "Olimpiisky" book market in central Moscow conducts brisk wholesale trade in neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic literature while one can easily purchase "Mein Kampf" and "Jewish Terror in Russia" from the pavement stalls in front of the largest bookshop in Moscow in the Novy Arbat Street.

The monthly "Russian Assembly" (city of Veliky Novgorod, print run of 999 copies) is distributed through the regular newspaper kiosks and seems to be quite popular. All articles in it are filled with vicious anti-Semitic allegations. The paper blamed "Zionists" for the September 11 tragedy claiming that "Ben Laden is not powerful enough for performing such a major terrorist act". A recent subject for discussion was the concern about insufficient ethnic Russian purity of the regional legislature. The economic problems of the Novgorod region are blamed on the influential "Zionist" politician, Mr Burbulis. The Jewish community of the town of Borovichi in the region appealed to the regional governor Mikhail Prusak to take steps for discontinuing the distribution of the openly anti-Semitic publication and to start criminal proceedings against the paper editor and writers for inciting ethnic hatred. The official answer signed by the deputy governor Grazhdankin was that the regional prosecutor's office initiated a relevant investigation the results of which would be reported to the community.

Development of civic tolerance

The Russian government has initiated the Federal programme "Development of civic tolerance values and extremism prevention in the Russian society" the implementation of which is of a special importance for ethnic minorities. The programme provides for development of the curricula and teaching aids for the public education system to promote the attitudes of tolerance with respect to ethnic and faith differences and the culture of peace in general. On April 22, 2002, Berl Lazar, the Chief Rabbi of Russia, gave a press conference at the "Arguments and Facts" publishing house on the subject of "Problems of Nationalism in Russia".

FEOR called on all ethnic and religious communities and associations in Russia to do everything in their power to establish the attitudes of tolerance towards all ethnic minorities and faiths in the public life and social relations.

Councils on the inter-faith dialogue are being established in some Russian regions. For instance, "Consultative council of ethnic minorities" is being organized in Volgograd. The "Inter-faith Peace Council" of the Southern Federal District includes representatives of the majority of the religious groups officially registered in the area.

In some regions the situation is not so quiet. The Council on the Affairs of the Ethnic Minorities and Religion at the Administration of Primorski Krai (Maritime Region, Far East) has sent out a rather controversial new policy document to the organizations representing ethnic minorities in the region. For instance, the document proclaims as a priority of the regional administration the desire "to

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uphold the positive sense of well-being of the [ethnic] Russian population". The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) suggested taking the following steps for improving the moral climate in the society under the threat of degrading anti-Semitic influences:

1. **To introduce tolerance-development curricula at all levels of public education system as soon as possible.**
2. **To keep on promoting attitudes of tolerance through all mass media and to establish and uphold the image of Russia as a multicultural society ruled by law.**
3. **To give access to the government-controlled media for all officially recognized faith-based communities for conducting educational programming.**
4. **To institute tight legal controls over extremist publications and their distribution.**
5. **To pay attention to the legal responsibility of the media owners and managers for their actions in producing and distributing extremist propaganda and publications including Internet site hosting.**
6. **To introduce more stringent accountability for adults who involve underage young people in the extremist activities.**
7. **To strengthen the coordinated contributions of the law-enforcement agencies to combating the extremist trends in public life.**

Summary: contemporary anti-Semitism in Russia

1. There is no state-sponsored anti-Semitism in Russia. This phenomenon started to fade away during the decay of the Soviet Union in the late 80s and has been practically eliminated as a matter of Federal policy by the new Russian government.
2. The everyday social anti-Semitism remains a major problem in Russian life. It is not only rooted in the ancient folk traditions; it is also sustained by the pressures exerted by the right-wing and left-wing radicals and the carelessness and sometimes powerlessness of some of the regional administrations and politicians.
3. Some evidence appeared in late 2002 pointing out that attempts were being made to attach political significance to the everyday anti-Semitic attitudes. Thus anti-Semitism is effectively being positioned as an instrument employed by political radicals for attacking the fundamental institutions of democratic authority in Russia.
4. The Federal government in general and most regional authorities are aware of the social and political hazards of the everyday anti-Semitism as demonstrated by the joint efforts made by the Federal legislators and the Presidential Administration for promulgating the law "On controlling the extremist activities".

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The authorities are concerned with the acts of anti-Semitism and xenophobia and a relevant department was established at the Ministry of the Interior for controlling them. In this atmosphere the Jewish organizations have additional options for a wider and closer cooperation with the authorities in preventing and fighting anti-Semitism.