

## **Anti-Semitism in Russia: 2003**

### **Introduction**

Anti-Semitism has deep roots in the history of Russia and its people. For generations, anti-Jewish rhetoric was used by successive regimes and by politicians at all levels, and it always found a ready audience. With the emergence of the Russian democracy in the last decade, Russia no longer has state-sanctioned anti-Semitism, but while the general environment is more tolerant toward Jews, it is still far from perfect. Modern-day Russia is still in the first steps of developing a civil society, and much effort is still necessary to encourage tolerance in all levels of public life. At the present moment, while most of society does not actively support extremist anti-Semitic appeals and actions, the Russian population is not ready to stand up publicly against xenophobia in the country.

ADL has continuously monitored manifestations of anti-Semitism and xenophobia in the Russian Federation since 1999. The year 2003 was marked by several new trends in the changing nature of anti-Semitism in Russia. While the number of incidents remained stable, the nature of the attacks has become more violent. While Russian President Vladimir Putin has publicly denounced the nationalist ideology and has supported legal action against anti-Semitic publishers and skinheads, lower level officials do not pay the same attention to anti-Semitic incidents.

Other noteworthy developments over the course of the year:

- Anti-Semitic rhetoric was featured in comments by some candidates in the campaign for the State Duma (Parliament) in December 2003 and the Presidential elections in March 2004. The same tendency was observed during some mayoral and gubernatorial elections in a number of regions of the Russian Federation;
- The Government has started demonstrating some political will in the prosecution of perpetrators in anti-Jewish activities and statements; however, these efforts have not filtered down to lower-level state officials.
- While the September 11 terrorist attack led to widespread pro-American and pro-Jewish attitudes, the war in Iraq has provoked a new wave of anti-Semitic/anti-Israeli sentiment.
- The prosecution of a number of prominent business leaders, commonly known as "oligarchs," some of whom have Jewish origins, appears to have bolstered anti-Semitic attitudes among susceptible elements of the population

In 2003 the following types of anti-Semitic incidents were reported:

- violence against Jews and Jewish organizations
- anti-Semitic propaganda via mass-media, the internet, and publications
- statements and activities of political parties and leaders
- vandalism

### **Violent attacks on Jews and Jewish Institutions**

The number of violent attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions remained at the same level of 2002, and in 2003, and there was a marked increase in the brutality of the attacks. This type of crime is mainly committed by young skinheads, the movement which numbers at least 15,000 people (even according to the underestimated government statistics).

- April 15: A group of skinheads attacked and destroyed a car of the Nizhniy Novgorod Jewish youth leader Oleg Sharno. The car was parked near a synagogue where the young activist works. The incident was not reported to the police due to the victim's fear of escalating the conflict.
- April 21: An object that looked like a bomb was found in the yard of a 16-story apartment house near the synagogue on Malaya Bronnaya in Moscow. Tenants were evacuated and a Federal Security Service sapper squad was summoned to the site. The squad defused the suspicious object. Civil society experts and Jewish leaders defined it as an act of intimidation.
- June 23: Windows in a Yaroslavl synagogue were broken by people throwing rocks. According to the community, this was the third attack in Yaroslavl in 2003.
- June 28: In Novosibirsk, a Jewish couple received anti-Semitic threats over the phone and were then beaten and heavily injured by three young men.
- September 20: The explosion of a small bomb, attached to the poster "Izya is a Queer" occurred in the Kaliningrad (Western Russia) Jewish kindergarten. The poster was found by a 14-year boy who came to visit a kindergarten. The boy was injured and hospitalized.
- September: A visitor to a Taganrog (South Russia) synagogue was stopped by a skinhead and told that the Jews must be exterminated. The Taganrog community reports that after many considerably calm years the number of anti-Semitic incidents has grown significantly since mid-2003.
- October 5: On Yom Kippur night and on December 12, rocks were thrown at the Kostroma synagogue windows. While in previous years such attacks took place mostly late at night when the buildings were empty, the above incidents happened during the prayer, and about thirty people were in the synagogue each time.

### **Booby-Trapped Signs**

Since the first booby-trapped sign exploded on a Moscow highway on May 27, 2002, such signs continue to appear in different Russian locations. The signs, which feature anti-Semitic slogans, are posted in public spots, often with hidden explosives attached. When people attempt to remove the objectionable signs, the explosives detonate. Approximately half of such incidents involve false bombs, others – real explosives. While the idea of booby-trapped signs was initiated in Moscow, it is now copycatted all around the country.

On August 1, the poster with a traditional "Death to Yids" slogan was found on the Moscow – Simferopol highway, 61 kilometers from Russia's capital. On September 2, the guards of the Great Novgorod Synagogue found an anti-Semitic poster with wires attached to it. However, the Federal Security specialists who arrived found that the bomb was in fact a plaster cast. It was suggested that the incident might be connected with the anti-Semitic newspaper editor Pavel Ivanov's court case that took place on the same time. Another sign with a plaster cast bomb was found near Moscow in early September. And in October a suspected bomb was found on one of the tombs at the Kostroma (Central Russia) Jewish cemetery. Fortunately – also a plaster cast one.

### **Vandalism**

Anti-Semitic vandalism has always been common in Russia. What has changed over the past decade is the tendency of vandals to repeatedly choose the same sites to vandalize. This implies that such attacks are premeditated and not spontaneous.

- February 2: Someone attempted to set a synagogue in Cheliabinsk (Urals) on fire. In July, the synagogue was covered with graffiti.

- April 11: Swastikas were spray-painted on the Jewish tombs in the Volgodonsk (Southern Russia) cemetery.
- May 1: Twelve Jewish tombs were destroyed in the Moscow Vostrakovskoe cemetery, the primary cemetery for Moscow Jews for several generations.
- June 15: The synagogue in Voronezh (Central Russia) was vandalized.
- June 28: The Piatigorsk (North Caucasus) Jewish cemetery was vandalized. Ten tombstones were smashed.
- August 15 and 22: The grave of the famous (Jewish) actor Veniamin Zuskins in Penza (Urals) was vandalized.
- September 28: Posters appeared in Taganrog (South Russia) with the symbol of death and a slogan: "Jews, go to your motherland!"
- October 11: The Kostroma (Central Russia) Jewish cemetery was attacked and 10 tombs destroyed and in December the synagogue has also been vandalized.
- December: The Jewish day school in Bryansk was covered with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans.

### Anti-Semitic Publications

Anti-Semitic articles and books produced by extremists are common and easily available. Although much of the content violates Russian law, the production of this material continues, and the publishers are rarely prosecuted. There is no clear legal definition of "ethnic hatred" and the judge has to make the determination himself. In such cases, when Jewish or other public organizations attempt to take legal action against the publishers, the courts are generally unwilling to recognize the presence of anti-Semitic content in the publications.

Anti-Semitic literature is sold freely all over the country. The average cost of "Mein Kampf" is about 300 rubles (approximately \$11). The "Deluxe" edition is also available for a bit more. Several Moscow-based publishing houses specialize in this type of literature. Among them are "Russkaya Pravda", "Vitaz", "Peresvet".

About a hundred "patriotic," "Slavic," and other newspapers, which publish anti-Jewish and xenophobic statements and articles still operate in the country and are sold freely. In Moscow, a group of such newspapers developed its own distribution network, and they are available at practically every subway station. Many of the large and medium-sized cities in the provinces have their own publications of such a nature, often sponsored by the local chapters of NDPR radical party.

- The Nizhniy Novgorod *Russkoe Vechе* newspaper regularly publishes anti-Semitic articles. Typical statements are: F. Dzerzhinskiy (the founder of NKVD – later the KGB) is "a Zionist and yido-mason". While charges were brought against the paper's editor Pavel Ivanov, on September 8 the Novgorod court acquitted him based on "the lack of evidence." The prosecutor appealed and the case was reopened and the hearings reopened in November.
- On May 9, 2003, the anti-Jewish newspaper *Russkii Sibir* (Novosibirsk) received a final warning from the Ministry of Press due to its articles of May 7 - "The Jewish mafia machinations" and "The Russian or Jewish question". The court convicted Mr. Kolodizenko, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, but he was given amnesty, which is traditionally granted in conjunction with the World War II victory celebration. Ironically, another anti-Semitic publisher – Victor Korchagin from Moscow – was also given amnesty under the same provisions. On December 9 the Novosibirsk (Siberia) prosecutor took additional legal action against Kolodizenko.
- In September the Mariy Al (Urals) *Patriot* newspaper published a series of articles by the People's Democratic Party leader Igor Rodionov, where he described "international Zionism" as "our main enemy, which possesses a system of organizational structures and is based on the principles of Judaism."
- Also in September, in Stavropol, an article in the local nationalist newspaper accusing the Jews of distributing "extremist literature" (the author named the "Kitzur Shulhan Aruch" – a nineteenth

century text of Jewish religious law). In response to the article, the city's administration summoned a local community leader and ask him for an explanation.

### **Hate on the Internet**

There are at least 80 Russian Web sites and three large Web portals regularly engaged in distributing anti-Semitic, racist and hate propaganda online. There are no legal instruments in the Russian Federation to fight hate on the Internet, because the law does not restrict online media. However, several campaigns were undertaken in 2003 by Jewish organizations to urge providers to deny hosting web-resources with anti-Jewish, racist or xenophobic content.

Although most of the Internet access providers have adopted policies prohibiting dissemination of racist materials by their clients or subscribers, few monitor the web pages and sites they host. When alerted to a particular hate site, some of the providers responded quickly by denying service to groups and individuals that engaged in hate propaganda. More common, however, is a situation when a Russian internet provider does not have a proper user agreement or when extremists use internet providers based outside of Russia, allowing them to pursue hate activities without restrictions.

As the Internet becomes available to increasing numbers of Russians, hate groups can share information and freely disseminate materials. Yet, there has been little indication that Russian legislative and law enforcement bodies are ready to take serious steps against racist and anti-Semitic Web activities.

### **Anti-Semitic Themes in Politics**

The 2003 political campaign for the Duma was marked by a significant rise of nationalistic rhetoric. While no politicians publicly expressed anti-Semitic views, most of the parties running for election exploited nationalist themes of the "Russian people" resuming its position as the main source of power the country. Some parties implied purely ethnical definitions of the term "Russian", others insisted that the Russian Federation is a country where Russian culture and traditions should be (or are) dominant. The main surprise brought by the elections was the victory of "Rodina". This proudly nationalist organization was founded only several months prior to elections, but won 10 percent of votes.

While most Russian politicians did not include overt anti-Jewish propaganda in their political statements during the campaign for the Duma, some radical leaders continued to appeal to patriotic and anti-Semitic feelings of an element of the electorate:

- At the Communist Party (KPRF) election campaign coordination meeting last December, Gennady Zuganov touched on "The Jewish Question" and urged the regional party activists to pay attention to the "ethnic misbalance in the government offices staffing."
- On May 6, a Communist member of the State Duma, during a public speech in his home city, blamed Jews for the low birth rate in Russia, saying that "the lowering of the birthrate is the result of the chaos shown on television channels" and demanded that the Duma do something to "stop this licentious synagogue."

In local election campaigns, anti-Semitic propaganda is frequently used by politicians. Traditionally, large events with anti-Semitic content take place around the May Day Holidays, which customarily are days for public demonstrations and meetings.

- In Moscow, during a rally organized by the KPRF, "Trudovaia Rossia" and the NBP(National Bolshevik Party) parties, 3,000 people held signs reading "The Foundation to Save Russia from the Kike-Mason Yoke" and similar slogans. Speakers accused the forces of "world Zionism" acting through "oligarchs" of destroying Russia. Terms like "Tel Aviv-vision" and "Abramoviches" were

employed, and one speaker said of the “oligarchs”—“At any moment they are ready to crawl off to Israel or the USA, but we will find them even there.”

- In Pskov (Northwest), skinheads marched in a column as part of the May Day celebrations, screaming slogans like “Russia for Russians!” The head of the Pskov branch of the Party of Freedom, Georgy Pavlov, criticized the government for “doing nothing for the native population” of Russia. Mr. Pavlov was sentenced to five years in prison in 2001 for hate crimes committed when he was the head of the local branch of the now-banned Union of Veneds, but he was obviously released early.

## **The YUKOS Investigation**

One of the major stories in Russia in 2003 was the criminal investigation into YUKOS, one of the country’s largest oil companies, and the arrest of the company’s owners.

There is no evidence that the YUKOS investigation was motivated by anti-Semitism. However, there are examples where politicians and extremists used the YUKOS situation to fan anti-Jewish animosity. The YUKOS owners are publicly identified as so-called “oligarchs” – representatives of wealthy and politically influential members of the Russian elite. Public opinion regularly cite the oligarchs as a source of the country’s social problems, and there is a widespread recognition that many oligarchs, including the former head of YUKOS, Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, are Jewish or have Jewish roots. The antipathy towards the oligarchs has had an anti-Semitic component. While Khodorkovskiy’s Jewish roots have never been discussed in the public press, private discussions of his arrest inevitably touch this topic. This trend can be easily monitored on web forums, where about half of the postings on every “YUKOS-oriented” topic are anti-Semitic.

## **Government Action**

The Russian Federal Government no longer plays a role in sponsoring or promoting anti-Semitic activities. Federal officials are not involved in encouraging ethnic violence and are taking certain steps to stop and prevent it. Anti-Semitic statements are not encouraged and are sometimes even legally prosecuted. However, lower level officials are not as willing to oppose anti-Semitism as the country’s leaders, and there were several reported cases of openly anti-Semitic statements from government authorities in some Russian regions, especially, in Krasnodar Kray, South of Russia.

In 2003, some notable positive changes were observed in governmental policy towards anti-Semitism. Some long-awaited legal actions against anti-Semitic propaganda and skinhead groups were taken and the government clearly expressed its determination to deal with the problem. However, some analysts believe that these initiatives will be limited to high-profile cases and declarations and will not seriously change the situation.

Several legal actions against anti-Semitic publishers progressed in the summer and fall 2003. For example, on October 14 the Nizniy Novgorod City Court cancelled the decision of the District Court, which found the anti-Semitic publisher Paul Ivanov not guilty, and a new hearing was scheduled.

Also this year, the first court trials of skinheads charged with ethnic strife kindling began. In Novosibirsk, court hearings began on October 7, with 9 people accused. On November 11 another trial began in Volgograd. According to the Ethnic Affairs Department Head Minister Vladimir Zorin, these developments show that the legal mechanism of fighting ethnic extremism has become efficient. However, a final conclusion can be drawn only after the court decisions are announced. As some experts suggest, the widely publicized trials might slowly collapse and not lead to any sentences.

In the past 12 months the president of the Russian Federation has continued to build friendly relationships with the Jewish community. During the traditional meeting with the Chief Rabbi of the Russian Federation (Chabad), Berel Lazar, President Putin stated that “the Russian society has many times demonstrated the

rejection of any forms of xenophobia that prevent the country's normal development". Concerning the victory of nationalistic parties in the Duma, Vladimir Putin made a statement during his annual live question and answer broadcast, saying that people who use nationalist slogans for political campaigning are provocateurs who try to agitate public opinion. These words were interpreted as a public denouncement of nationalistic platform.

At the present stage the willingness of the country's leaders to oppose anti-Semitism is not accompanied by the adequate response among lower-level officials as well as society as a whole.

### **Suggested Measures**

Anti-Semitism is a complex phenomenon, which is comprised of legal, political, social and psychological aspects. Therefore the approach to fighting anti-Semitism requires the joint effort of government, civil society representatives, educators and legal professionals. Russia should do more to create a more tolerant atmosphere in society. For example, anti-Semitic statements should receive public condemnation along with legal punishment. The following are actions the Russian Government should undertake to boost the efforts aimed at combating all types of anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic conduct:

- Ensure that Russian officials at all levels publicly condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism and xenophobia in the territories under their jurisdiction;
- Increase the number of international and domestic programs targeted at supporting pro-tolerance and civic education in Russia
- Ensure that law enforcement pay attention to the racial and anti-Semitic content of hate crimes.
- The Federal government and law enforcement bodies should actively condemn and outlaw anti-Semitic and xenophobic statements of the local authorities in the regions of Russia.
- Special efforts should be made to help the public differentiate between the oligarchs as a social class and Jews as one of the ethnic groups

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