



Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,  
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia

## NewsWatch April 2004

### NCSJ Testifies on Anti-Semitism, its Hopes for OSCE Berlin Conference

On April 8, NCSJ joined leadership from the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith International to testify on anti-Semitism before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' Subcommittee on European Affairs. The Honorable A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, was the lead witness.

Secretary Jones detailed the State Department's three-pronged approach to the issue: direct cooperation with European governments, particularly through the OSCE process; support for the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research; and working through U.S. embas-

sies on bilateral efforts.

Community witnesses were Mark B. Levin, Executive Director of NCSJ; Rabbi Andrew Baker, Director of International Jewish Affairs for the American Jewish Committee; Caryl M. Stern, Senior Associate National Director of the Anti-Defamation League; and Daniel S. Mariaschin, Executive Vice President, B'nai B'rith International.

Mark Levin thanked subcommittee member Senator George Voinovich (R-OH) for his sponsorship of a bill calling on the State Department to issue country-by-country assessments of anti-Semitism, and described the role of formerly communist states in pushing Western Europe to deal with anti-Semit-



After the April 8 Senate Hearing (l.-r.): Rabbi Andrew Baker, American Jewish Committee Director of International Jewish Affairs; Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director; A. Elizabeth Jones, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs; Ambassador Edward O'Donnell, U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues

### Putin Re-elected; Opposition Ponders Future



March 14: A woman votes in the Russian Presidential elections OSCE photo

Incumbent Russian President Vladimir Putin swept the March 14 presidential election with 71.31 percent of the vote. (64.4 percent of registered voters participated.) Though international leaders were quick to congratulate Putin on his victory, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) rated the elections less than democratic: "Essential elements of the OSCE Commitments, of the Council

of Europe's standards for democratic elections — such as such as a vibrant political discourse and meaningful pluralism — were lacking." Of particular concern were the heavy media bias in favor of Putin and lack of coverage of the other contenders' campaigns.

But judging from his high popularity ratings, the only obstacle to Putin's re-election would have been voter apathy: 50 percent of registered voters must participate to validate an election. Many Russians, including many Jews, were frustrated by Putin's political strength and declined to vote. Putin's supporters made massive gains in the 2003 parliamentary elections, and Putin, clearly confident of his return to office, refused to debate the other candidates and reshuffled his Cabinet before the election to get a head start on his next term.

Regional leaders and Duma members were involved in unorthodox measures to ensure adequate voter turnout, according to Russian election-monitoring NGO

Golos, such as requiring hospital patients to obtain absentee ballots and bribing apathetic voters with raffle prizes and discounts

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## NCSJ Testimony, OSCE-Berlin, cont'd

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U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell at the December 2003 OSCE Ministerial in Maastricht; Powell will attend the Berlin Conference OSCE Photo

ism. Having recounted a number of recent anti-Semitic attacks that occurred in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania, Levin stressed that the growth of civil society is a key element in this relationship: "Addressing anti-Semitism is much easier to achieve where relationships already exist among relevant interest groups, and as civil society sinks deeper and wider roots."

Varied initiatives have taken place under governmental or grassroots sponsor-

ship in the former Soviet region to address anti-Semitism, including two recent inter-faith anti-terrorism conferences in Kazakhstan, and the KOLOT initiative to combat domestic violence through religious communities. But the United States continues to play a vital part in the formulation of these initiatives: "I reiterate the singular importance of American leadership in fighting anti-Semitism, in building strong and pluralistic post-communist societies, and in transmitting our values to a new generation of Europeans — even as the identity and boundaries of 'Europe' are undergoing a fundamental transformation."

### BERLIN CONFERENCE

The April 28-29 OSCE conference on anti-Semitism, hosted in Berlin by the German government, will be attended by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, with former New York City Mayor Ed Koch chairing the U.S. delegation for the duration of the conference. Priorities for this second OSCE conference include achieving consensus on a strong statement that condemns anti-Semitism and commits individ-

ual countries to proactive action steps, and developing an implementation strategy for the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to collect hate-crimes data and promote training, education and legislation throughout the OSCE region.

NCSJ's participation in the Berlin conference is part of ongoing involvement in the broader Helsinki process, and focused coordination with partner agencies and governments on anti-Semitism during the past two years. NCSJ Chairman Dr. Robert J. Meth will lead NCSJ's delegation to Berlin, which will include Dr. Judith Wolf, NCSJ Treasurer; Lesley Israel, NCSJ Secretary; Allen Kronstadt, NCSJ Board Member; Fred Israel; and Shai Franklin, NCSJ Director of Governmental Relations. NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin, who served as a U.S. Public Delegate to last June's OSCE Vienna Conference, will be attending the Berlin conference as a Public Advisor to the U.S. delegation.

In addition to testifying April 8 before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Levin also participated in a March 2004 NGO consultation with ODIHR Director Christian Strohal.

## Putin Re-elected; Liberals Ponder Future, cont'd

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on utilities or housing bills. In addition, domestic observers and the Russian press reported that between 1 million and 2 million names disappeared from Russia's electoral rolls in the three months prior to the election — reducing the total number of votes needed for a valid election. In the month since the election, the Federal Election Commission has been pressing hard for an end to formal review of the results, while in additional poll results reported, Putin won more than 92 percent of the vote in Chechnya.

Riding the wave of his popularity, and with the help of considerable administrative advantages, Putin defeated Communist Party candidate Nikolai Khartonov (13.7 percent), State Duma Deputy Sergei Glazev (4.1 percent), and liberal independent Irina Khakamada (3.8 percent). Many Jews said they preferred Khakamada to the other contenders, and her results were highest in the big cities where Jews are concentrated. In addition, Khakamada garnered 25 percent of the absentee votes filed from Israel. The Jewish community reaction to

Putin's victory was mixed — Putin's relationship with the Jewish community and Israel has been generally positive.

Putin responded to U.S. criticism of the election by invoking the controversy surrounding the United States' 2000 presidential election, and he reiterated his earlier statements in support of transparent democracy in Russia. "I promise you that the democratic achievements of our people will be ensured and guaranteed. We will not rest at what has been achieved; we will strengthen the multi-party system. We will strengthen civil society and do everything to ensure freedom for the mass media. . . . Most of all, the main aim is to strengthen democratic institutions."

The government Putin created just two weeks prior to the election includes little-known Mikhail Fradkov as Prime Minister and former Duma member Aleksandr Zhukov as sole Deputy Prime Minister. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, replaced Igor Ivanov as Foreign Minister, a move many in the West welcomed, as it portends a more conciliatory approach to foreign policy.

As his first major policy statement after the election, Putin declared a war on poverty, promising to cut the current 25 percent

poverty rate to 10-12 percent within four years. Analysts are waiting to see if Putin's promises of major reform are fulfilled.

### FATE OF THE LIBERAL PARTIES

In the wake of the failure of liberal factions in the recent elections, liberal party leadership and supporters have been speculating with bitterness on the future of liberal democracy in Russia. Irina Khakamada, meanwhile, has formed her own political party, Free Russia.

Former Yukos head and liberal party funder Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who remains imprisoned in Moscow on charges including tax evasion, sent a letter to Russian newspapers in late March praising Putin and pledging his support for the president's tough stand on big business. In the letter, Khodorkovsky also accused Khakamada of making exaggerated claims about Putin's human rights and civil liberties record. The statements shocked many in Russian politics and business, as Khodorkovsky had been a major critic of the President until the March election.

Given these polarized responses to the election, the future of the liberal parties remains murky, as liberal party leadership struggles to regroup and redefine itself for Russian voters.

## Lithuanian Editorial Prompts Calls for Government Investigation

One of Lithuania's main-stream national newspapers, *Respublika*, published a three-part Letter from the Editor series titled "Who Rules the World?" which outraged local and international Jewish groups and has prompted an investigation by Lithuanian prosecutors. Featured on the front page and accompanied by caricatures of an ultra-Orthodox Jew and a gay man holding the globe, the articles accuse an international Jewish mafia of ruling the world.

*Respublika* stakeholder and Editor in Chief Vytas Tomkus wrote in one article, "Could any of us think that the members of the international mafia would start covering their dirty activities with the memory of Holocaust victims?"

The Israeli Foreign Ministry summoned the Lithuanian Ambassador and asked him to convey Israel's "deep disappointment, anger, and shock" at the articles. In conversation with NCSJ, community leader Simon Alperovich said Tomkus is notorious for his anti-Semitic rhetoric.

On March 8, Lithuania's Foreign Minister summoned the am-

bassadors of EU member states and forthcoming EU members to report on Lithuania's response, and to reaffirm his government's commitment to zero tolerance of anti-Semitism. The Speaker of the Parliament expressed similar sentiments. Also on March 8, NCSJ and B'nai B'rith International met with Lithuania's ambassador in Washington to discuss follow-up and to express appreciation for Lithuania's rapid, resolute and public response. Since then, the Lithuanian parliament has also condemned the articles.

The Prime Minister has asked the Prosecutor General to investigate whether the newspaper has violated the law against inciting ethnic hatred. NCSJ has been in phone and e-mail contact with Lithuanian and other officials, as well as Lithuanian Jewish community leaders and our partner organizations.

For further developments, please visit [www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org)

## ARZA National Assembly

NCSJ member agency the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA) held its National Assembly in Washington, D.C., March 26-29. Titled "Building a Renewed Vision Together," the conference brought together progressive Jewish leadership from across the United States and Israel, as well as representatives from constituent agencies and other supporters.

Mark Levin, NCSJ Executive Director, addressed the

conference on the current situation in the former Soviet Union and the opportunities for Progressive Judaism in the region. In addition, Mr. Levin acknowledged the important contribution ARZA/World Union North America's outgoing Executive Director Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch has played in encouraging the development of progressive Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union.

## NCSJ, Partner Agencies Meet Georgia's New President



New York City, February 2004: Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili greets Jewish leaders prior to a meeting sponsored by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and NCSJ. (l.-r.): Mikhail Saakashvili, President of Georgia; Rabbi David Hill, NCSJ Vice President; Mark Levin, NCSJ Executive Director; (back left) Malcolm Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Photo: Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations

## JCPA Plenum: "A Just Society"

More than 350 U.S. Jewish leaders attended the Jewish Council for Public Affairs' 2004 Plenum "Creating a Just Society: Acting on our Commitments at Home and Abroad" on February 21-24, in Boston.

This year's Plenum included sessions on advocating for Israel, confronting Jewish poverty, and interfaith relations.

Shai Franklin, NCSJ Director of Governmental Affairs spoke at a Task Force meeting

on Israel and Other International Concerns and led a workshop on preparations for the upcoming Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe-sponsored Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism,

Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs, brought together community representatives at the Plenum to discuss models for future Kehilla projects.



February 22, 2004: (l.-r.) Burt Siegel of Philadelphia; Michelle Kohn, Vice Chair of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; and Shai Franklin, NCSJ Director of Governmental Relations

## Orthodox Union Hosts Passover in Kharkiv

The Orthodox Union conducted a series of large-scale Passover sederim in Kharkiv, Ukraine, organized through the city's OU-sponsored Joseph K. Miller Torah Center. On the first two nights of the holiday, nearly 500 parents, teachers and community members attended a seder at the Center, with hundreds more at

individual university student, high school student, and children's seders, also at the Center. Another community seder was held outside Kharkiv.

Over 1,000 pounds of matzah were shipped from Kyiv, and the rest of the food from Israel, to supply this year's Passover Program as well as packages of food for individual family celebrations.

## Matzah Reaches Uzbekistan

Almost at the last minute for Passover preparations this year, matzah shipped by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was allowed through customs on the Uzbekistan border and reached community recipients. The matzah had been held up at the Kazakh city of Shimkent for days during the fallout of terrorist attacks throughout Uzbekistan in late March. A number of international Jewish organizations, including NCSJ, the Con-

ference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, American Jewish Committee, Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and the Uzbekistan Jewish community, negotiated for the April 3 release of the matzah.

According to the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, security for all of Uzbekistan's synagogues was tightened over the holiday. The Federation's matzah was shipped and distributed several weeks before Passover.

## Rabbi Lazar Honored

In early April, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded Rabbi Beryl Lazar, one of Russia's chief rabbis, the Order of Friendship. The award recognizes Lazar's efforts to promote good inter-faith and international relations.

### SAVE THE DATE

### NCSJ's Board of Governors Meeting in Washington, DC

June 7, 2004  
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

CHECK [WWW.NCSJ.ORG](http://WWW.NCSJ.ORG) FOR DETAILS



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