

## NCSJ Weekly News Update

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NEWS.....

**WASHINGTON, D.C. June 20, 2008**

**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

**FROM: Edward B. Robin, Chairman;  
Lesley Israel, NCSJ President;  
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

In Brief: NCSJ Torch of Liberty Award Given to Alexander Machkevitch

Dear Friend,

This week NCSJ held two special events in Washington, D.C. On Monday June 16 we hosted a dinner in honor of Alexander Machkevitch, President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress at the Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens. NCSJ guests were given a private tour of Marjorie Merriweather Post's extraordinary collection of Russian Tsarist art from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. People traveled from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan and from across the United States to join us in honoring Mr. Machkevitch and his work in the revitalization of Jewish life throughout the former Soviet Union.

On Monday June 17 we presented Mr. Machkevitch with the NCSJ Torch of Liberty award at our Board of Governor's meeting. This award is given to individuals who have made a significant, positive impact on the lives of Jews in the former Soviet Union. Over 100 people, including a number of Ambassadors, attended this event in tribute to Machkevitch's dedication to building and nurturing Jewish life in the region. In accepting the award, Mashkevitch thanked NCSJ for "contributing their hearts and their lives for people who live ten thousand kilometers from the United States...such beautiful synagogues, it's a real miracle and it would never have happened without NCSJ."

The meeting also included presentations from two students who participated in our Student Leadership Mission to Moscow coordinated by NCSJ and sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington in conjunction with American University Hillel and Moscow Hillel. Rabbi James Morgan, Director of International Projects at the JCRC of Greater Boston showed a moving film about Boston's partnership with Dnepropetrovsk. Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, spoke about the latest developments in Ukraine. Georgian Ambassador Vasil Sikharulidze presented Mahnaz Harrison from Pittsburgh the position of Honorary Consul of Georgia. Our keynote speaker was Under Secretary of State William Burns who spoke about U.S. – Russian relations.

Sincerely,

Mark B. Levin  
Executive Director

Ed Robin  
Chairman

Lesley Israel  
President



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. June 20, 2008

-----INDEX OF ARTICLES-----

1. *NCSJ awards philanthropist*  
JTA Brief, June 20, 2008
2. *The Politics of Double Exposure*  
By Francesca Mereu  
The Moscow Times, June 20, 2008
3. *U.S. Companies, Aid Agencies Fighting HIV/AIDS in Russia*  
By Jonathan Schaffer  
US Department of State, June 13, 2008
4. *Russian professor endorses blood libel*  
JTA Brief, June 16, 2008
5. *Chief rabbi in Russia cites major problems*  
JTA Brief, June 12, 2008
6. *Chabad-Russia case to proceed in U.S.*  
JTA Brief, June 17, 2008
7. *Gazprom's Dirty Secret.*  
By Roman Kupchinsky  
The Moscow Times, June 18, 2008
8. *Free and Flush, Russians Eager to Roam Abroad*  
By CLIFFORD J. LEVY  
The New York Times, June 15, 2008
9. *Old Farming Habits Leave Uzbekistan a Legacy of Salt*  
By SABRINA TAVERNISE  
The New York Times, June 15, 2008
10. *Uzbekistan: State TV 'Threatens' RFE/RL Journalists*  
RFE/RL, June 13, 2008
11. *Kyrgyz author and statesman Aitmatov laid to rest*  
By LEILA SARALAYEVA  
The Associated Press, June 17, 2008
12. *Israeli Physicians to Provide Heart Surgery for Ukrainian Children*  
JTA Brief, June 20, 2008

13. *Ukrainian group foments anti-Semitic sentiment*  
JTA Brief, June 16, 2008

14. *As Poles Balk, U.S. Eyes Lithuania as Site for Missile Shield*  
By JUDY DEMPSEY  
The New York Times, June 19, 2008

## **#1**

### **NCSJ awards philanthropist JTA Brief, June 20, 2008**

A Washington-based group that lobbies on behalf of Jews in the former Soviet Union presented its highest honor to a billionaire benefactor and president of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

In a ceremony during its annual board meeting on Tuesday, NCSJ - formerly known as the the National Conference on Soviet Jewry - thanked Alexander Mashkevich for his efforts to renew Jewish life in central Asia, building synagogues and starting an umbrella group to represent Jews.

"It's a real miracle what has happened today, such beautiful shuls and synagogues," Mashkevich said in accepting the award. Mashkevich made his fortune in mining.

NCSJ also heard from William Burns, the outgoing ambassador to Russia and now undersecretary for political affairs at the U.S. State Department.

## **#2**

### **The Politics of Double Exposure By Francesca Mereu The Moscow Times, June 20, 2008**

While it remains unclear whether Dmitry Medvedev or Vladimir Putin is more powerful, many government officials have reached a compromise — at least on what to hang on their walls.

The portraits of Putin that dominated government offices during the eight years of his presidency are giving way to photographs of Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev together.

In the White House, where Putin has his office, many bureaucrats have hung the photos on their walls, a White House official said.

"Officials are mainly hanging the picture of them together in their offices. There is no rule forcing you to do that. It is their choice," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk with the media.

Former Prime Ministers Mikhail Fradkov and Viktor Zubkov were denied such an honor, the official said. "I never saw their portraits anywhere. People only had President Putin's portrait at the time," the official said.

It was unclear which officials had hung up the photos. The White House official refused to provide names, and other people contacted at the White House refused to discuss the issue.

But pictures of the two leaders together are popular, if the hundreds that have popped up at stores around Moscow are any indication. Dual portraits of Putin and Medvedev are sold in all the big bookstores, while clocks and matryoshkas featuring the stern power couple can be found in kiosks and any stall selling souvenirs.

In the 17 years since the Soviet collapse, Russia has never had a powerful prime minister. Putin is an exception, and his dominance is confusing the country's bureaucracy, which is used to having "a point of reference," said Yury Korgunyuk, a political analyst with the Indem think tank.

"This is why they keep the portrait of both of them in their offices. They don't want to offend either of them, even from a visual point of view," Korgunyuk said.

"But our bureaucrats are really flexible: They can change their mind within few seconds. If they see that Putin is not powerful anymore, they will cut his portrait off the picture and throw it away," he said.

Since Medvedev was inaugurated as president on May 7, Viktor Deryugin, an artist who has been painting portrait of politicians since 1990, has sold about 100 copies of a framed portrait of Putin and Medvedev against the Kremlin or the Russian flag, as well as 100 diptyches of the two. Most of the buyers want to place the pictures in their offices, he said.

Deryugin said he also has sold five 140-by-73-centimeter oil paintings of Medvedev for 500,000 rubles (\$20,000) each. Putin by himself is selling less.

"Everyone has already bought their share over the past eight years," Deryugin said.

The Tvoi Portret company is offering a 10 percent discount on oil paintings of the leaders together or Medvedev alone until the end of this month. No Putin portraits are on sale.

"Such a picture emphasizes your status and strengthens your position," it says on its web site.

Tvoi Portret development manager Alexander Vladimirov said companies were the main clients. "Ordinary people do not hang these portraits in their homes," he said.

The Moskva bookstore on Tverskaya Ulitsa offers a 53-by-38 centimeter portrait of Medvedev in a suit and tie for 4,680 rubles (\$195), while for 2,510 rubles customers can take home a horizontal dual portrait of Medvedev chatting with Putin. A saleswoman said the dual portraits were big sellers.

Not everyone is hanging the portraits in their offices.

"We haven't reached such a level yet," said Sergei Mitrokhin, a Moscow City Duma deputy with the opposition Yabloko party.

State Duma Deputy Gennady Gudkov has a portrait of Soviet secret police founder Felix Dzerzhinsky in his office.

"I think he was a professional, and I respect him," said Gudkov, a member of A Just Russia and former KGB official.

He said he was given Putin's portrait years ago but kept it "somewhere at home."

Russia's youngest State Duma deputy, Robert Shlegel, 23, said he has pictures of friends in his office. "I haven't thought about hanging a portrait of the president and the prime minister. It is a tradition, but maybe I'll hang a Russian flag," said Shlegel, a member of United Russia, the party headed by Putin.

A City Hall official said only new bureaucrats intent on climbing the government ladder placed portraits of Putin and Medvedev in their offices. "The veterans don't care about this show of loyalty to the powers that be. They know that they are not losing their jobs," the official said.

He added: "We have [Moscow Mayor Yury] Luzhkov's portrait. This is enough."

When a reporter at Putin's last Kremlin news conference in February asked him whether he would put Medvedev's portrait on his wall, Putin replied dryly that he did not need to make such a display of loyalty.

"I don't need to bow to his portrait — there are other ways of building a relationship," Putin said.

And he seems to have kept his promise. "Putin does not have any portraits in his office," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday.

### **#3**

#### **U.S. Companies, Aid Agencies Fighting HIV/AIDS in Russia**

**By Jonathan Schaffer**

**US Department of State, June 13, 2008**

In March, employees at the Pepsico plant in Kashira, Russia, participated in training sessions that encouraged them to find out their HIV status and to discuss behaviors and attitudes that might help stem the rise of AIDS in their community.

In Irkutsk, Orenburg and Ivanovo, programs funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development are training regional planners to evaluate HIV/AIDS intervention methods. As a result, these regions have boosted resources for prevention efforts.

On May 27, managers from multinational corporations working in Russia, including Chevron and Eli Lilly, met in Moscow to see what additional roles they could play in preventing the disease.

With the help of U.S. government money, a group called HEALTH@WORK has provided workplace HIV/AIDS prevention and nondiscrimination programs to firms employing more than 1 million Russians in the transportation, oil and gas, manufacturing and heavy industry sectors.

But health experts say much more is needed. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Russia has experienced one of the fastest-growing HIV/AIDS epidemics in the world. Just a decade after HIV was first identified in Russia, the Joint U.N. Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that more than 1 percent of adults aged 15-49 are HIV positive and that 43 percent of all newly reported cases are occurring in women.

In a report issued in March, the organization said that in 2006, the most recent period for which data are available, 66 percent of all new cases of HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia occurred in Russia.

HIV now has been detected in virtually all of the country's 89 administrative territories, and serious epidemics have surfaced in 10 regions and major cities: the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and the regions of Chelyabinsk, Irkutsk, Leningrad, Moscow, Orenburg, Samara, Sverdlovsk and the Khanty-Mansi autonomous district.

Health experts say the sharing of contaminated needles by drug users is responsible for about two-thirds of HIV transmission, and unprotected heterosexual intercourse is a growing factor in transmission.

Complicating the crisis is the emergence of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). Patients with HIV/AIDS have weakened resistance, and nearly 60 percent of those who recently died from HIV/AIDS also had TB.

Eli Lilly is working with Russian partners to help with disease surveillance and training programs and to increase the supply of capreomycin and cycloserine, medications effective in treating MDR-TB.

In 2005, Eli Lilly helped establish a center of excellence in Tomsk, Russia, to train doctors, nurses and healthcare workers from all over the former Soviet Union in preventing, detecting and treating MDR-TB.

Chevron is a founding corporate sponsor of Transatlantic Partners Against AIDS (TPAA), an initiative aimed at bringing together the Russian and U.S. governments and the private sector to address the disease.

Under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Russia has received some \$53 million in program support during the last four years.

Most U.S.-supported work has been in two regions -- St. Petersburg and the Orenburg province. These efforts have included encouraging vulnerable groups to adopt safer behaviors, providing information about precautionary measures, urging early medical intervention, encouraging HIV-infected patients to make use of outpatient services, and enhancing competence and knowledge among midlevel medical personnel.

U.S. initiatives also are aimed at helping Russia develop a unified information system that will improve HIV/AIDS monitoring and evaluation, anti-viral treatment and palliative care.

#### **#4**

##### **Russian professor endorses blood libel JTA Brief, June 16, 2008**

A professor at a Russian state university reportedly endorsed blood libel against Jews during a lecture.

Svetlana Shestakovaya, an assistant professor of sociology at Tyumen State University in western Siberia, said during a lecture linked to a state-sponsored educational program that she believed Jews ritually murder Christian children and used their blood to make bread for Passover, according to a report by the Slavic Law Center.

The lecture came as part of a training course for a government-sponsored program called the "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" that has been implemented in several of Russia's regions.

According to the law center, Shestakovaya said the Jews perform "a Jewish Eucharist that uses a small quantity of blood of [Christian] Orthodox people whom they martyred."

Leading figures in the Russian Jewish community have spoken out against compulsory Orthodox education in Russia, where the church has taken on a prominent role in Russian national identity.

Shestakovaya also lashed out at Islam for being motivated by an "occult, evil spirit," Protestantism for being a collection of "pseudo-Christian sects" and Catholicism as a "heresy," the center reported.

#### **#5**

##### **Chief rabbi in Russia cites major problems JTA Brief, June 12, 2008**

A chief rabbi of Russia said that nationalism and compulsory Christian education are major problems in the country.

Berel Lazar, one of two chief rabbis in Russia, in an interview with the German newspaper Deutsche Welle said he believes that nationalist groups -- skinheads, anti-immigration groups, far-right ideologues -- were not as numerous as some estimate, but that such groups would grow in force if no one fights against them. "The consequences can be devastating," said Lazar, the head of the Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities. "With these forces we first get aggressive slogans, then actions, then murder."

He said the authorities understand the nature of these groups but tend to marginalize them.

Lazar also protested the release of a textbook by the pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi that educates students about the country's roots in Russian Orthodox Christian culture.

"This is a serious problem," he said. "There shouldn't be a preference for one religion by the government."

Forcing students in Russian schools to study Orthodoxy would make Jews and other religions feel like second-class citizens, he said, and that would create widespread antipathy and injustice.

#### **#6**

##### **Chabad-Russia case to proceed in U.S.**

## **JTA Brief, June 17, 2008**

A decades-long struggle between Chabad-Lubavitch and Russia can proceed in the American court system, a U.S. appeals court ruled.

At issue are more than 12,000 religious texts and an archive of some 25,000 handwritten pages on Chabad philosophy and Jewish law dating back to the 18th century.

Chabad has waged a 70-year battle with the Soviet and Russian governments to wrest the archives from the Russian government and return them to their main library in Brooklyn, said Rabbi Shalom Dovber Levine, the head of the library for Agudas Chasidei Chabad.

The Bolshevik government seized a portion of the library during the October Revolution circa 1917 as the head Lubavitch rebbe fled the country to Poland. The texts were stored in the Lenin Library, later known as the Russian State Library.

The Nazis confiscated the remainder of the archive circa 1939 as they marched across Eastern Europe. It was later taken back by the Russian government and currently resides in the Russian State Military Archive.

In the opinion released June 13, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia said that certain parts of a case filed in 2004 could proceed to the earliest phases of its first day in U.S. court.

Since the suit was filed, a succession of appeals has focused merely on whether U.S. courts had the jurisdiction to hear the case.

In the 1990s, all 100 members of the U.S. Senate and more than 350 members of the U.S. House of Representatives signed on to requests to have the library returned.

### **#7**

#### **Gazprom's Dirty Secret.**

**By Roman Kupchinsky**

**The Moscow Times, June 18, 2008**

On Thursday, during my testimony at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I asked a rhetorical question: Did President Dmitry Medvedev, while serving as chairman of Gazprom, know that the company might have been linked to organized crime through the Swiss-based intermediary company RosUkrEnerg? I believe that he knew this but ignored it.

As Gazprom's chairman, he should have known.

The response from Russian readers to this statement, posted on web sites, was very defensive. Some reminded me of the Enron scandal and that U.S. President Bill Clinton on his last day in office pardoned Marc Rich, who was charged with tax evasion and making illegal oil deals with Iran during the hostage crisis. Readers were also disturbed that some American with Ukrainian heritage tried to damage the good name of the new Russian president in a Senate hearing.

These were understandable reactions, yet they revealed a traditional feature of Russian society -- no one is allowed to criticize the tsar. This means either that the country's president stands above the law, or that the dividing line between criminality and governance is blurred at best.

The conflict surrounding RosUkrEnerg, the company that transports gas to Europe, has been a thorn in the side of Russian and Ukrainian leaders since 2004. The company is owned 50 percent by Gazprom and 50 percent by a group of Ukrainian businessmen. So many contradictory statements have been issued by Gazprom spokesmen, the partnership's Ukrainian managers, politicians and leaders of the two countries that it is almost impossible to determine where the truth lies. Yet, Switzerland-based RosUkrEnerg seems to lead a charmed life, despite hundreds of critical articles in the press.

Recent reports state that Gazprom is upset with the company for its business dealings in Poland and is making plans to deprive them of this client. The absurdity of the situation is typical of the entire scheme. Gazprom is upset with RosUkrEnergo for selling gas to Poland at prices lower than those charged by Gazprom Export. The head of Gazprom Export, Alexander Medvedev, meanwhile, sits on the board of RosUkrEnergo. Such a schizophrenic relationship cannot be explained commercially, so Gazprom Export's director now claims that Ukraine forced RosUkrEnergo upon Gazprom. This is like saying Russia forced Sevastopol upon Ukraine and now wants it returned.

Throughout the four years of the RosUkrEnergo ping-pong game, Gazprom's business reputation has suffered considerable damage. Burghard Bergmann, the head of E.ON Ruhrgas and member of the Gazprom board, has asked that ties be broken with RosUkrEnergo. But Gazprom's managers stubbornly cling to this company and to their two Ukrainian partners, whose names they claimed not to know for years.

Why was Gazprom willing to see its reputation destroyed over such a long period? Were there commercial reasons for this, or did personal interests play a greater role?

Did Medvedev, as Gazprom's chairman, know the full story behind RosUkrEnergo? Did he read the reports that Semyon Mogilevich, who was arrested in Moscow in January on tax-evasion charges and is on the FBI's wanted list on charges of defrauding investors, was supposedly linked to RosUkrEnergo? Did the Federal Security Services investigate these allegations?

There are simply too many questions and too few answers surrounding this matter, and the sooner it is closed, the better it will be for both Russia and Ukraine.

The time is opportune to finally clean up Gazprom. A new chairman of the board is due to be elected soon, and he should not be manipulated into ignoring this scandal and letting it drag on for another four years.

If Russians do not want to be preached to by the Western press and politicians, it is imperative that they do some preaching of their own to their elected officials. They should demand that the sun be allowed to shine inside the secretive halls of Gazprom.

*Roman Kupchinsky is a partner in the risk analysis firm AZEast Group.*

**#8**

**Free and Flush, Russians Eager to Roam Abroad**

**By CLIFFORD J. LEVY**

**The New York Times, June 15, 2008**

Yelena Kasyanova booked her trip at a local travel agency in about as much time it takes to drop by the market for a few groceries. She was soon lounging here by the Mediterranean, a working-class anybody from an anyplace deep in Russia, a child of the Soviet era who still remembers the humiliating strictures that once made it difficult to obtain a passport, let alone a plane ticket.

And all around the beach were so many just like her.

One of the most enduring changes in the lives of Russians in recent years has occurred not in Russia itself, but in places like this coastal region of Turkey, where an influx of Russian tourists has given rise to a mini-industry catering to their needs. A people who under Communism were rarely allowed to venture abroad, and then lacked money to do so when the political barriers first fell, are now seeing the world. And relishing it.

There is perhaps no better symbol of the growth in Russian tourism than the very resort where Ms. Kasyanova was staying, the Kremlin Palace Hotel, a kind of Las-Vegas-does-Moscow-by-the-shore extravaganza whose buildings are replicas of major sights at the Kremlin complex and nearby neighborhood. Why go to any old spot when you can frolic by the pool while gazing at the reassuring onion domes of a faux St. Basil's Cathedral? (No need to bundle up against the cold, either!)

Ms. Kasyanova, 51, a health-care aide from the Kaluga region, 125 miles southwest of Moscow, has been to Egypt, Hungary and Turkey in the last few years and has Western Europe in her sights. For her and other Russians interviewed here, foreign travel reflects not just Russia's economic revival under Vladimir V. Putin, but also how the country has become, in some essential ways, normal.

If you have some time and a little money, you can travel. Just like everyone else in the world.

"It is now so easy — buy a package tour for \$800, and here we are, in paradise," said Ms. Kasyanova, who, like many Russians here, was amused by the resort's trappings but also interested in exploring the mountains and other places nearby. "It speaks of the high standard of life in Russia, of the improvement in life in Russia."

The Russians are coming from all over. At the local airport here, the arrivals screen was like a primer in Russian geography, with charter flights from Moscow, Rostov-on-Don in the south, Kazan in the center, Novosibirsk in Siberia and other cities in between.

The number of Russian tourists visiting countries outside the former Soviet Union grew to 7.1 million in 2006, the last year statistics were available, from 2.6 million in 1995, according to the Russian government.

A record 2.5 million Russians visited Turkey in 2007, up 33 percent from 2006, Turkish officials said. Only Germany, that paragon of European wealth, sends more tourists to Turkey. (By contrast, in 1988, a few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, all of 22,000 Soviet citizens visited Turkey.)

The Russian tourism boom is happening as new low-cost airlines in Europe have spurred a sharp increase in tourism across the Continent. But for the Russians, the chance to travel is especially prized.

For the first time in Russian history, wide swaths of the citizenry are being exposed to life in far-off lands, helping to ease a kind of insularity and parochialism that built up in the Soviet era. Back then, the public was not only prevented from going abroad; it was also inculcated with propaganda that the Soviet Union was unquestionably the world's best country, so there was no need to leave anyway.

People who desired foreign travel in Soviet times typically had to receive official approval, and if it was granted, they were closely chaperoned once they crossed the border. Even before they left, they often were sent to classes to be indoctrinated in how to behave and avoid the perils of foreign influence. Those who were not in good standing with the party had little chance of going.

The controls on travel were particularly onerous given Russia's long and dark winters.

"For us, it's like a fairy tale to be here," said Lilia Valeyeva, 46, a clerk from Chelyabinsk in the Ural Mountains who had never before been abroad when she visited Turkey two years ago. Since then, she has returned twice.

"We are seeing other countries with our own eyes, how other people live," she said.

Many Russians interviewed here credited Mr. Putin, the former president and current prime minister, for their ability to travel, saying that he was responsible for Russia's new prosperity.

"It is not like before, when we were afraid of everything," said Larisa Kazakova, 32, a real estate agent from Yekaterinburg. "We travel, and we live a good life."

These days, Russians can compare the services they receive abroad with those at home, and can mingle with tourists from everywhere. How these experiences will alter their perspective at home is an intriguing question.

The writer and commentator Viktor Yerofeyev said he had noticed that the more Russians traveled, the more they tended to lose some of the coarseness that at times characterized Soviet society.

“Through all this travel, we are seeing a change in mentality at home,” Mr. Yerofeyev said. “People are now seeking pleasure, whether it is in the night clubs of Moscow or in restaurants. Travel is a continuation of that pleasure. Just to have pleasant lives, not to suffer, to feel positive. Their life compass changes, from ‘I don’t care about anything’ to ‘I would like to have a better life.’ Travel is a part of this.”

“The world is becoming part of their lives,” he said.

The first major wave of Russian tourists after the fall of the Soviet Union did not necessarily do their country proud, sometimes acting like rowdy college freshmen getting a taste of spring break in Florida. There were tales of hotels limiting or even banning some Russian tour groups because of drunken behavior.

Hotel executives in Turkey said things had largely settled down, with many Russian families now vacationing here, and relatively few problems.

“Nobody believes me when I say this, but the Germans drink even more than the Russians,” said Ali Akgun, a manager at another hotel in the area, the Kemer Holiday Club. “It’s just that the Russians drink a little faster.”

The biggest struggle now for the Turkish hotels is to find enough staff members who speak Russian. Those in the tourism industry who had mastered German and English are returning to language school.

“Everybody is studying Russian now,” said Suat Esenli, a worker at the Kremlin Palace Hotel, which has more than 800 rooms and opened in 2003, just as Russian tourism began to soar. Typically, about 60 percent of the hotel’s patrons are from the former Soviet Union, with the rest from elsewhere in Europe.

Still, the effort to make Russian guests feel comfortable can go too far. For a time, one of the hotel restaurants served the sort of dishes — borscht, blinis and the like — that should have brought joy to a Russian’s heart.

The restaurant had to scrap the menu. It turned out that the last thing that the Russians wanted was the food they could get at home.

## **#9**

### **Old Farming Habits Leave Uzbekistan a Legacy of Salt**

**By SABRINA TAVERNISE**

**The New York Times, June 15, 2008**

KHUJAYLI, Uzbekistan — Salt crunches underfoot like frosty soil on this bare stretch of land in western Uzbekistan.

“Thirty years ago, this was a cotton field,” said a 61-year-old farmer who has lived near this city all his life. “Now it’s a salt flat.”

Uzbekistan, a land-locked country that was once part of the Soviet Union, is home to one of the biggest man-made disasters in history. For decades its rivers were diverted to grow cotton on arid land, causing the Aral Sea, a large saltwater lake, to lose more than half of its surface area in 40 years.

But old habits are hard to break, and 17 years after the Soviet Union collapsed, cotton is still king and the environmental destruction continues unabated, cutting into crop yields. Uzbekistan is the world’s second-largest cotton exporter after the United States, drawing a third of its foreign currency earnings from the crop, but that status seems increasingly threatened by corruption, poor planning and the degradation of cropland.

Far less money is spent now on maintaining the vast networks of water drainage and irrigation that crisscross the country than was expended under Communism. Authorities spend about \$12 per hectare on maintenance (a hectare is around two and a half acres), down from \$120 per hectare in Soviet times, according to the International Water Management Institute. Blocked drainage pipes push salt levels up, damaging the land and dragging crop yields ever lower.

A United Nations report in 2001 estimated that 46 percent of Uzbekistan's irrigated lands have been damaged by salinity, up from 38 percent in 1982 and 42 percent in 1995.

"The delivery system is dilapidated, the drainage system is failing," said one foreign expert, who asked that his name not be used because he has to work with Uzbek officials. "It is a big problem."

How that has affected cotton production is a difficult question. Cotton and its production are ensnared in politics, so national statistics on it are scarce. But a pattern of decline in the industry was evident in three regions based on local figures provided to The New York Times.

In Karakalpakstan, the region that contains what is left of the Aral Sea, the total area of land under cultivation has dropped by 14 percent since 1991, according to local statistics. In the Bukhara region in the south, land planted with cotton has declined by 15 percent in the past eight years, and in Jizzax, a region in central Uzbekistan, 15 percent of the cultivated land has become too salty to farm.

In Manghit, a small city near Khujayli, an early sign of saltiness came in the 1980s when mushrooms that had grown along the banks of the mighty Amu Darya River began to disappear, a local farmer recalled. Soil that used to grow 4.5 tons of raw cotton, measured with seeds and stems, per hectare now produces 2.5 tons, and in some places as little as 1.3 tons, said the farmer, who asked that his name not be used because Uzbek authorities frown on people speaking to foreign journalists.

"When you see this salt, sad, dark thoughts take you," he said, explaining that the salt is what is left when water evaporates after intense irrigation. "Nothing grows on salty land. It's like standing on a graveyard."

Uzbekistan's environmental problems date from the 1950s, when Nikita S. Khrushchev ramped up industrial agriculture, diverting river flows into a vast new maze of industrial-size canals. Slowly, the land began to change.

The farmer in Khujayli recalled a car trip with his father in the winter of 1954 near the city of Muynoq that began with a crossing of miles of Aral Sea ice. Now the shore is more than 50 miles away from the city. In the 1970s, his grandfather's apricot trees died. Salt eats away at shoes here and turns bricks white. "For so many years we raped the land," said the farmer. "This is the result."

Sharing dwindling water resources is a maddening post-Soviet puzzle. Central Asia, once a single part in the Soviet machine, is now five countries with competing interests. Uzbekistan, the most populous, depends on its neighbor Kyrgyzstan for water. This year will be dry, Uzbek farmers and officials said, because Kyrgyzstan used more of its water than usual to generate electricity for heat last winter, which was unseasonably cold.

Environmental woes, however, are only part of the problem. Uzbekistan's farming industry is still largely frozen in its Soviet past. Though the industry was rearranged several years ago to break the Soviet-era collective farms into private plots, the price paid for cotton is still set by the government, as are the quotas for how much to grow. The state price is set at less than one quarter of the world market price.

As yields decline and government prices remain low, farmers say that profits are increasingly elusive, and in some areas farmers have begun to abandon their fields. One farmer in Jizzax said he had stopped farming one parcel that had grown too salty, and he drove with a reporter past abandoned fields that stretched as far as the eye could see, more than 700 acres, he said.

As in Soviet times, production plans are not closely coordinated with the realities on the ground, and in Jizzax the local authorities, whose jobs depend on fulfilling quotas, have started to force bad fields — about a third of the cultivated land area in the region, according to local statistics — onto state institutions such as the post office, the state pension fund and schools, three farmers there said. Those, in turn, are forced to farm the land or to pay cash to satisfy the quota.

"Jizzax is an experiment," said one of the farmers, who asked that his name not be published to avoid trouble with local officials. He provided a document for a plot of land that had been abandoned by a farmer and was

now the responsibility of a local school. Farmers who did not meet quotas were fined and even taken to court, as was the case in April with 89 farmers.

“Farmers have no rights,” he said. “They are just ordered around by the government.”

The farmers who are fined must pay with cash, which forms the heart of a cycle of corruption that has enriched officials for generations. Those officials, envied and vulnerable to charges of corruption, change with the seasons: In Jizzax, there have been five heads of the main cotton processing factory since 2000, the farmers said.

Some farmers violate the government’s rules and plant crops other than cotton, a practice that has been encouraged by foreign experts who say that crop rotation will allow the land to rest. But the government has often prohibited other crops, not wanting to suffer declines in cotton, and farmers grow other things at their own risk. This spring in Tajikistan, a neighboring country that also relies on cotton, farmers were growing watermelons on the sly, as though they were crops of illicit opium poppies.

“We are destroying ourselves,” said the 61-year-old farmer in Khujayli. “Why are we planting cotton, and what are we getting from it? We never ask those questions.”

The government is starting to acknowledge the problem, and last year it issued an order that will set up a fund for drainage improvements. The World Bank is also financing a program to improve drainage.

Some experts argue that if irrigation is managed properly, the soil in most of the country can still be productive. Wheat yields, they say, have increased sharply in the past decade, which is evidence of soil fertility. In a study of 12 farmers in the Khorezm region over four years, Kirsten Kienzler, a doctoral student at the Center for Development Research of the University of Bonn, said their cotton and wheat harvests were not declining.

She argued that farmers were still steeped in the Soviet system, in which the state did everything, and while it is true that they do not receive world prices for cotton, they are also not paying world prices for fuel, fertilizer or water, which are subsidized by the state.

Even so, the state still owns the land, and farmers said they were leery of committing to large projects while they remained renters. A farmer in the Bukhara region said that he was no longer breaking even, since fuel prices jumped in the past few years, and that he secretly hoarded cotton to sell on the black market to pay his bills.

“I am stealing from myself,” he said, gesturing at a storage room piled high with illicit cotton. “Soon I’ll have to sell these,” he added, snapping the waistband of his sweat pants.

## **#10**

### **Uzbekistan: State TV 'Threatens' RFE/RL Journalists RFE/RL, June 13, 2008**

Uzbekistan -- Service's bureau in Tashkent, 14 Dec.2005

Uzbek state television has aired a program about RFE/RL that rights activists and political analysts say contains "the worst kind of threats" against the broadcaster's Uzbek journalists and amounts to "terrorism" against the free press.

The hour-long program was stridently critical of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service -- known as Radio Ozodlik (Liberty) -- accusing its reporters not only of violating journalistic ethics but also of carrying out antistate activities. The program broadcast detailed personal information on several Ozodlik journalists and their family members, including addresses, passport information, places of work, and even the names and locations of their children's schools.

Most Ozodlik journalists live in Prague after RFE/RL's Tashkent bureau was forced to close after reporting on the Andijon massacre in May 2005, in which Uzbek troops fired on a crowd of civilian protesters, killing hundreds, according to witnesses and rights activists. But many of the relatives of Ozodlik journalists remain in Uzbekistan.

"This is really, deeply worrying," says Andrew Stroehlein, media director for the International Crisis Group (ICG), a nongovernmental policy group focused on conflict prevention. "These television stations are known to have close links with the security services, and it's very well known that last year, when they vilified another journalist by the name of Alisher Saipov, he was murdered very shortly after."

Saipov, a correspondent for the Voice of America and frequent RFE/RL contributor for Uzbek-language programs, was gunned down last year in the Kyrgyz city of Osh. The killing of the 26-year-old ethnic Uzbek was widely believed ordered by Uzbek security forces.

### Prime Time

The broadcast about Radio Ozodlik was aired on three state-run regional Uzbek television stations at prime time on June 9 and 10 to an estimated audience of 11 million, including in areas of neighboring Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Elsa Vidal, who heads the European and post-Soviet desk at the Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), expresses solidarity with RFE/RL's journalists and their families.

"These public addresses on television broadcasts jeopardize their security because they are targeted now as 'traitors,' which we know is usually the first state before deeper harassment," Vidal says. "So we hope this won't go further, but unfortunately we think we are now witnessing a worsening of the situation in Uzbekistan."

Abdurahman Tashanov, a Tashkent-based independent journalist, called the program a direct threat. "This program is terror, political terror against democrats and journalists who don't share the government's views, who oppose it," Tashanov says.

"The state has always used this policy since the early years of independence and has improved it. In the early years of independence, they used it against opposition members, then in the early 2000s -- under the pretext of the war against terror," he adds. "Now, it has become an information war. The regime uses it to survive because democratic voices from Radio Liberty, BBC, and other foreign media sources are a problem for the Uzbek government."

RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin called the program "a direct and deliberate attempt to endanger our journalists." In a written statement, Gedmin added: "The Uzbek government has produced these broadcasts to portray our journalists as criminals, and therefore either to incite attacks against them or to condition viewers for attacks it may seek to perpetrate itself. These are the acts of an outlaw regime, not of a respectable government."

### Media Freedom Conference

The program was aired on the same days that the Uzbek government hosted a conference on "media freedom" in Tashkent that human rights advocates called a "sad farce." In April, the European Union had agreed to hold the conference together with the Uzbek government, inviting top international rights groups to attend such as the ICG, RSF, Human Rights Watch, and the Open Society Institute.

The EU made its decision on the same day it had agreed to maintain a freeze on sanctions against Uzbekistan imposed after civilian protesters were killed in 2005 in the eastern city of Andijon. However, Uzbek officials scrapped the agreed plans for the EU-Uzbek conference on media freedom, instead staging their own. None of the international rights groups were invited.

Both Vidal and Stroehlein say it was darkly ironic that the conference was held on the same days that the Uzbek stations aired their program on Radio Ozodlik. Stroehlein says the authoritarian government of Uzbek President Islam Karimov -- which both Washington and the European Union have tried to engage in recent months after pursuing a tougher policy of isolation over rights abuses -- feels that it can act with "complete impunity against people who are trying to bring some kind of free information to the citizens of that country." "It's awful, appalling in every way," he says.

This week, Uzbek authorities arrested former RFE/RL journalist and human rights activist Solijon Abdurahmanov, accusing him of "antigovernment" activity. Abdurahmanov had been an RFE/RL correspondent until 2005, when the Tashkent bureau was closed.

Last month, on the third anniversary of the Andijon events, Uzbek police arrested another former RFE/RL journalist, Nosir Zokirov. He was the first reporter to cover the massacre.

## **#11**

### **Kyrgyz author and statesman Aitmatov laid to rest**

**By LEILA SARALAYEVA**

**The Associated Press, June 17, 2008**

More than 20,000 people paid their final respects Saturday to Chingiz Aitmatov, an author and statesman who helped introduce his Central Asian nation to the world.

Aitmatov, 79, died of pneumonia Tuesday in Germany, where he had been hospitalized after falling ill last month. He died of pneumonia at a clinic in Nuremberg, said Lucien Leitess, the head of his German publisher.

One of the few Kyrgyz known outside his nation of 5 million people, Aitmatov wrote novels about the lives of ordinary people under the Soviet regime. Several Soviet films were based on his novels, which lovingly evoked Kyrgyz folklore.

"The Kyrgyz people lost one of their finest sons, but that is not all," Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev said at the funeral in Bishkek. "The world lost a spiritual messiah whose words resounded in the hearts of millions of people on the planet."

Aitmatov first found fame with his 1958 novel "Jamilya." Set during World War II, it tells the story of a young Kyrgyz woman who leaves her husband and runs away with a crippled war veteran. The novel sparked heated discussions in the majority Muslim and male-dominated society about whether a woman could leave her husband for another man.

Aitmatov was also an advocate of preserving the cultures and languages of non-Russians in the Soviet Union.

He introduced the term "mankurt" to describe people turned into slaves through torture and memory loss. Kyrgyz nationalists use the term derogatorily to describe ethnic Kyrgyz who have abandoned their ancestors, history and culture for the Russian language and the Western way of life.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sent his condolences in a message praising the writer, whose works, "affirming the ideals of kindness, justice and humaneness, have found their way into the hearts of readers living in diverse countries and belonging to different generations."

The funeral procession stopped on Bishkek's central square for a minute of silence before proceeding to the Ata-Beyit memorial complex on the city's outskirts.

Aitmatov was buried beside his father, Torekul Aitmatov, a Communist leader who was executed in 1937 during the Stalinist purges.

As the Soviet Union was breaking apart, Aitmatov became a diplomat and served as the Soviet and then Russian ambassador to Belgium from 1990 to 1993. In 1995, he became Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

## **#12**

### **Israeli Physicians to Provide Heart Surgery for Ukrainian Children JTA Brief, June 20, 2008**

Israeli physicians will provide heart surgery for children in Ukraine under a joint venture with a Ukrainian foundation.

The Aleksandr Feldman Charitable Foundation and Save a Child's Heart launched a project Tuesday in Ukraine to provide urgent pediatric heart surgery and follow-up care that Ukrainian physicians cannot provide.

Feldman, a lawmaker, philanthropist and the head of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, said the project will begin at the Kharkov Regional Hospital for Children and then will be implemented in other regions of Ukraine. The project includes helping Ukrainian physicians raise their skill level.

Israeli physicians visited Ukraine at Feldman's invitation.

Save a Child's Heart provides urgent pediatric heart surgery for children from developing countries such as China, Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Jordan, Russia, Sri Lanka and Ukraine, as well as to children in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

The organization has treated more than 42 Iraqi children and 800 Palestinian children from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

## **#13**

### **Ukrainian group foments anti-Semitic sentiment JTA Brief, June 16, 2008**

A previously unknown Ukrainian group has made anti-Semitic and racist threats.

The group, the Union of Young Orthodox Ukrainians, made the threats during a recent press conference, according to a local monitor for the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union.

The new group has a charter which calls for the removal of "all Rabinoviches" from Ukrainian media. Vadim Rabinovich is a prominent Jewish media mogul and supporter of Jewish life in the post-Soviet state.

The charter also calls for a struggle against unspecified forces that supposedly aim to "destroy the Ukrainian culture, religion and nation," the monitor reported.

During the press conference to announce their existence, the group made threats to a shadowy conspiracy theory of Jewish control in Ukraine and immigrant encroachment.

"Ukrainians have the right to take any action in defense against the kike occupation and immigrants," the monitor reported the group as saying.

## **#14**

### **As Poles Balk, U.S. Eyes Lithuania as Site for Missile Shield By JUDY DEMPSEY The New York Times, June 19, 2008**

Poland is balking at further negotiations with the United States over plans to deploy an antiballistic missile shield, prompting Washington to seek out Lithuania, formerly part of the Soviet Union, as a possible alternative location, officials said Wednesday.

The American approach to Lithuania is likely to stir fresh tensions with Russia, which has already threatened to act if the United States deploys the shield's missile interceptors in Poland and its radar in the Czech Republic. Both are NATO countries that once belonged to the defunct Soviet-led Warsaw Pact.

But the idea of putting the shield on former Soviet territory surprised some European security experts.

"The last thing we need is another conflict with Russia," said Gereon Schuch, program director in the Robert Bosch Foundation for Central and Eastern Europe at the German Council for Foreign Affairs.

Russia is already angry over NATO's attempts to expand to Ukraine, another former Soviet republic, especially since NATO's top representatives visited Ukraine this week to see what changes it was making to start membership talks.

Russia has made clear that it will try to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and may retaliate. It is, for example, preparing to introduce visa restrictions for Ukrainians entering Russia.

If the United States negotiated to deploy the shield in Lithuania, Russia would almost certainly adopt an even tougher stance toward that country, military experts said. The Russian defense and security establishment still finds it extremely difficult to accept that the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, broke away from the Soviet Union and became independent in 1991 and subsequently joined the European Union and NATO.

"There is no doubt that Russia would exploit this to the full if parts of the U.S. missile shield were based here," said Raimundas Lopata, a professor of political science at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University.

The State Department said its security experts had already spoken to the Lithuanians.

"We have had general conversations with the government of Lithuania about missile defense issues," said Tom Casey, the State Department's deputy spokesman. "But, certainly, we expect and hope that we will be able to conclude an agreement with Poland in the near future. And we do expect it will work out, so I don't think there's going to be a need for any alternatives."

But Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon spokesman, said Tuesday that "there are other options available to us."

"There are several European countries that could host the interceptors, and Lithuania is one of them," he said.

Juozas Olekas, the Lithuanian defense minister, said Wednesday that his government was waiting to see what terms the United States might offer.

The overtures to Lithuania reflect exasperation in Poland and the United States over negotiations to deploy the shield in Poland.

In March, Poland's center-right government, led by Donald Tusk, presented the United States with a short but costly list of conditions for placing up to 10 interceptors on its territory. It demanded that the United States provide a mobile air defense system that NATO diplomats have said could cost billions of dollars.

Radek Sikorski, the Polish foreign minister, said last month that if his country agreed to accept the interceptors and a United States presence, it needed to modernize its air defenses to protect itself from threats. The Polish Defense Ministry has said those threats could come from Russia.

The United States has rejected the Polish requests, apparently leaving the government in Warsaw with the impression that no deal can be struck before the Bush administration leaves office in January. Ministers have said it might be better to wait until a new administration is in place.