

# CENTRAL BLACK EARTH ECONOMIC REGION





## **Kursk Oblast**

Total Population: 1,347,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: 3,000.<sup>1</sup>

Bordering Ukraine, Kursk Oblast is a predominantly agricultural region whose governor, Aleksandr Rutskoy, helped lead the violent uprising against President Yeltsin's government in October 1993. In July 1999, the East-West Institute reported that Governor Rutskoy is attempting to abolish local self-government in the oblast and restore in its place the Soviet-era Council of People's Deputies. The Institute characterized this move as an attempt to solidify the governor's control over the oblast.<sup>2</sup>

### *RNU Activity*

According to the RNU's web site, the RNU is officially registered in the oblast.

### *Antisemitic Incidents*

On November 26, 1998, talk show host Vladimir Posner gave a speech in a Kursk theater which was attended by Governor Rutskoy and other officials. Local Communists demonstrated outside the theater carrying signs that read "Posner is a traitor and an agent of American imperialism" and "Posner is the enemy of the Russian people." Referring to Mr. Posner's Jewish ethnicity, one demonstrator told reporters, "Watching TV, it seems you are not in Russia, but in Israel."<sup>3</sup>

## **Lipetsk Oblast**

Total Population: 1,250,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

Ferrous metallurgy accounts for 65% of Lipetsk Oblast's industry.

### *Antisemitic Incidents*

According to the Lipetsk Society for Human Rights, which contributed to the joint Moscow Helsinki Group/UCSJ annual report, "The Human Rights Situation in the Russian Federation: 1998":

Displays of antisemitism were not noted, except for two articles which appeared in the district newspaper two years ago. As to the first of them, the local Prosecutor's Office conducted an investigation, but refused to bring criminal charges.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HIAS.

<sup>2</sup> EWI *Russian Regional Report*, July 15, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> EWI *Russian Regional Report*, December 3, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Lipetsk Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.

## Voronezh Oblast

Total Population: 2,504,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

Voronezh Oblast specializes in machine-building for the aviation, electronics and communications industries. Voronezh's governor, Ivan Shabanov, is a member of the KPRF. Voronezh is a major stronghold of the RNU.

As in many other parts of Russia, the local governor is engaged in a heated political struggle with the mayor of the region's largest city, in this case Aleksandr Tsapin, the mayor of Voronezh. On July 28, 1999 city deputy Vasily Kochergin, accompanied by several heavily armed men, forced his way into the mayor's office in an apparent attempt to seize power in the city. Earlier in 1999, Mr. Kochergin was proclaimed mayor of the city by the KPRF-dominated city parliament, but its ruling was nullified the next day by the Supreme Court.<sup>5</sup>

Governor Shabanov is reportedly trying to end local self-government government in the oblast by proposing that local rayon heads be elected by local legislatures rather than by universal suffrage, and has asked local legislatures to delegate to him the power to nominate candidates to these positions. In addition, he has asked that the mayors of each city in the region be elected in the same way. The East-West Institute speculates that Governor Shabanov will then ask that an upper house in the regional parliament, made up of district heads, be created and that it be given the power to elect the governor. This would allow Governor Shabanov to stay in power as long as he likes, without being accountable to Voronezh voters.<sup>6</sup>

### *RNU Activity*

The RNU is very strong in Voronezh and apparently has good relations with many officials there. According to the Interregional Human Rights Group, a local human rights organization, which contributed to the joint Moscow Helsinki Group/UCSJ annual report, "The Human Rights Situation in the Russian Federation: 1998":

The regional branch of the RNU in Voronezh Oblast is one of the largest. This organization enjoys if not the protection, then at least the tolerance of the authorities (the RNU is registered in the regional Department of Justice and freely carries out mass propaganda; some RNU members have public order squad cards).<sup>7</sup>

In October 1997, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published an article entitled "Russian Nazis Patrol the Streets of Voronezh" which made the oblast synonymous with the RNU. Reportedly, on June 22<sup>nd</sup> of that year, RNU members in full uniform (which includes their characteristic modified swastika) started patrolling the streets of Voronezh with the approval of the authorities, in a volunteer militia formation headed by Yuri Korolev, the former deputy chief of the oblast's Department of Internal Affairs. The RNU was paid 250,000 old rubles a month for their services.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> RFE/RL Newslines, July 29, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> EWI *Russian Regional Report*, June 17, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Interregional Human Rights Group, 1998 report.

<sup>8</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 18, 1997.

Until the Spring of 1998, the RNU and the police held joint patrols in the cities of Voronezh, Novovoronezh and Rossosh. After a series of incidents of ethnic and religious minorities being severely beaten by RNU members, the RNU was deprived of the right to jointly patrol with the police as a "People's Guard," though there are reports that this cooperation continues on an informal basis.<sup>9</sup> The deputy head of the local RNU, Yevgeny Yenshin, told a reporter from *Izvestiya* that over the period of several months the RNU had, "detained on the streets, in the markets, and in the railway station about 600 people of non-Russian nationality who had breached the peace." He then angrily asked the reporter, "Have you noticed how many Jews are walking on Voronezh streets?!" and went on to denounce "Yids," "Chechen scum," "under-developed races," and mixed marriages, which he said result in "mongrels."<sup>10</sup>

The local RNU is known for its attacks on members of NGOs, including the chairman of the Confederation of Free Labor, A. Kozlov,<sup>11</sup> and several journalists. When Sergey Nechaev, a representative of the Voronezh RNU, lost a lawsuit brought against a television station in Novovoronezh (which aired a program which he charged discredited him and his organization), he publicly threatened to "simply shoot" journalists. Representatives of the Novovoronezh television station and the regional Fund for the Protection of the Rights of the Mass Media requested that the city Prosecutor's Office bring charges against Mr. Nechaev for his threats. On May 25, 1999, the same request was sent to the Oblast Prosecutor's Office. It is not known what sort of response the authorities made to this request.<sup>12</sup>

RNU members reportedly guard one of the dormitories of the Agrarian University. As in other parts of Russia, some RNU members work in security agencies, a booming industry which gives RNU members financial rewards and more importantly, the right to bear arms. In violation of the law prohibiting political parties from operating on the grounds of educational institutions, the RNU headquarters is located in the building of the Voronezh Assembly Technical Secondary School. On September 20, 1997, the RNU held a regional conference at the school which was allegedly attended by Aleksandr Kosyrev, the chairman of the oblast parliament's standing committee on relations with the media and public and religious associations, and a member of the pro-Kremlin political party Our Home is Russia. This was followed by a press conference at the Oblast Parliamentary Center, a fact that was interpreted by some local journalists as a sign of the regional administration's favorable attitude towards the RNU. The RNU has training camps outside of the city and up to 1,000 youth have participated in their free combat training sessions.<sup>13</sup> According to official information, the RNU has 200 active members in Voronezh.<sup>14</sup> The local RNU also apparently has strong ties with the Voronezh Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose leadership allegedly blessed RNU banners at a 1998 RNU regional conference in Voronezh.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Moscow Times*, August 25, 1999; Report from Pyotr Kaznacheev, head of Anti-Fascist Youth Action, to UCSJ, August 1999; Interregional Human Rights Group, 1998 report.

<sup>10</sup> *Izvestiya*, September 23, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Confederation of Free Labor press center. Provided by Pyotr Kaznacheev.

<sup>12</sup> Interregional Human Rights Group, 1998 report.

<sup>13</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 18, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Russian Public Television First Channel, February 28, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 9, 1999.

The attention of the national and local press towards the RNU in Voronezh which followed the 1997 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article allegedly led to a violent response from the Voronezh RNU. *Novye Izvestiya* reported in November 1997 that local journalists who had criticized the RNU were threatened and even beaten. The head of the local RNU was quoted as saying, “I would not give the order for a beating, but I sympathize completely with someone who would.”<sup>16</sup>

Starting in February 1999, Voronezh authorities began to respond to governmental pressure and took some limited steps against the RNU. In February 1999, the local branch of the Ministry of the Interior canceled the permission it had granted earlier for the RNU to demonstrate on Petrovsky Square, in the center of the city. On the day of the expected meeting, police gathered on Petrovsky Square to prevent the RNU from assembling there.<sup>17</sup> In response, 100 RNU “sympathizers” without RNU uniforms or signs gathered on Petrovsky Square to denounce Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.<sup>18</sup> RNU activists in full uniform were seen a few days later distributing leaflets near a shopping center in a central part of the city.<sup>19</sup>

On the legislative front, the city administration sent a bill banning Nazi and other extremist symbols to the oblast parliament.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the bill was proposed by the city administration was not coincidental—Mayor Tsapin is considered an opponent of the RNU. However, as was mentioned above, Mayor Tsapin’s hold on power is tenuous.

In March 1999, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported that antisemitic RNU leaflets were placed on a memorial plaque to Osip Mandelstam, a famous poet who was exiled to Voronezh. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* alleged that Voronezh authorities are still sympathetic to the RNU and that streets and city transport cars continue to be “befouled” by RNU leaflets.<sup>21</sup>

In April 1999, the local newspaper *Voronezhsky Kurier* interviewed the chief of the Voronezh Oblast Department of Justice, Anatoly Ivlev. After stating that “practically no fence or post is protected from swastikas or insulting words directed at ‘people of Jewish ethnicity’” and that “Nazis come here from other cities to learn,” the reporter asked Mr. Ivlev what steps his office was taking against the RNU. Mr. Ivlev answered that the RNU had been registered in 1995 but would not be re-registered this year. In addition, the local Department of Justice planned to send to the Prosecutor’s Office a request to liquidate the RNU on the basis of three administrative violations that the Department of Justice had recorded. One involved the recruitment of under-age youth. Mr. Ivlev stated that three young women, two of whom are under the age of 18, came to the Department of Justice’s office and started distributing RNU literature there. When Mr. Ivlev confronted them, one of the young women said, “Yes, we are members of the RNU, that is our ideology. We have the right to go out and distribute our literature. In the USSR there was the Komsomol, in the West there are the Scouts, and here there is the RNU.” Whether or not the Prosecutor’s Office plans to liquidate the RNU was not reported.

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<sup>16</sup> *Novye Izvestiya*, November 4, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> *EWI Russian Regional Report*, March 4, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Russian Public Television First Channel, February 28, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> *EWI Russian Regional Report*, March 4, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> *EWI Russian Regional Report*, March 4, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 25, 1999.

Commenting on the anti-Nazi bill in the oblast parliament, Mr. Ivlev supported the decision of a special commission created by the parliament to determine whether or not Voronezh can legally pass such a law and secondly, what constitutes a Nazi symbol. The commission reportedly decided that the Voronezh parliament should send recommendations to the State Duma to pass federal anti-extremist legislation. Until appropriate federal legislation is adopted, Mr. Ivlev believes that no local legislative action against the RNU should be taken.<sup>22</sup> Given that the State Duma is dominated by openly antisemitic parties such as the KPRF and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR, both of which could easily become the targets of any seriously designed anti-extremist legislation, it is highly unlikely that the State Duma will ever pass such a law.

Since the interview with Mr. Ivlev was published in April, the RNU received one more warning for unlawful behavior, this time for an unsanctioned march in the city of Voronezh. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, the oblast Department of Justice sent to the local Prosecutor's Office documentation of the RNU's illegal activities, along with a request to liquidate the organization. At that point, the Prosecutor's Office was charged with reviewing this documentation and then applying to a court with a request to liquidate the organization. In response, the RNU contested in court the Department of Justice's findings. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Prosecutor's Office sent a letter to the Department of Justice stating that it could not take any action to liquidate the RNU until the court decides on the merit of the Department of Justice's complaint against the RNU. In the opinion of a local journalist covering the story, the question of liquidating the local RNU will most likely be put off indefinitely while it is debated in "endless court proceedings."<sup>23</sup>

In late June 1999, the RNU held a conference in Voronezh. According to the East-West Institute, the RNU insulated itself from having its conference banned by the authorities by not scheduling its own march or other demonstration afterwards. Instead, the RNU joined a protest by a group called Veterans of Labor.<sup>24</sup> Around 150 pensioners from this group, along with approximately the same number of RNU members, held a joint rally on June 26<sup>th</sup> at the Komintern factory. The RNU held signs which read, "Respect Russia or get out!" When the police demanded that the unsanctioned meeting end, RNU members replied that it wasn't an RNU meeting and that they were just holding the other demonstrators' signs "out of respect for their elders." The police decided not to break up the demonstration.<sup>25</sup>

The RNU allegedly has financial ties with some local businessmen, some of whom use RNU members as cheap alternatives to professional security services. The local newspaper *Moyo* reported in May 1999 on rumors that an argument has erupted within the local "Union of Businessmen" about the ties that some of its members have with the RNU. Sergei Fyodorov, the head of the "Brat" (Brother) company, who is running for a seat in the city parliament, allegedly uses the RNU as a security service and possibly as workers for his election campaign. Other local businessmen allegedly provide the RNU with financing to publish its leaflets.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Voronezhsky Kur'er*, April 20, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> *Voronezhsky Kur'er*, May 27, 1999; June 3, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> *EWI Russian Regional Report*, July 15, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> *Voronezhsky Kur'er*, June 29, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> *Moyo*, #19, May 11-17, 1999.

### *Xenophobia*

In September 1997, *Izvestiya* published a long article on racism in Voronezh. According to *Izvestiya*, there are approximately 1,000 foreign students in the oblast and assaults by skinheads against African, Middle Eastern and Asian students are a common occurrence. The parking lot near the Glory Monument and Student Dormitory #7 of Voronezh State University is reportedly a popular spot for skinheads to beat dark skinned students. Two Pakistani students were beaten by skinheads; one was taken to the hospital with a concussion and a broken nose. Two suspects were arrested and convicted of the crime and are serving three year prison sentences. Xenophobic attitudes are also expressed by officials and ordinary citizens. Reportedly, a student from Ghana riding a city trolley bus was told, “Hey monkey, punch my ticket!” and when a Jordanian student and his Russian wife applied for housing, they were confronted by a housing official who exclaimed, “What, an Arab? They live in a tent in the desert with 50 people and you want to give them housing space here?”<sup>27</sup>

In May 1999, the local newspaper *Molodoy Kommunar* published an interview with a local skinhead identified as “Dmitry K.” Dmitry criticized the RNU as doing nothing for Russia, though in general he agrees with the RNU’s ideology. In the interview, Dmitry K. compared black people to animals, admitted to stabbing non-Russians, and accused Jews in the Russian government of harming Russia.<sup>28</sup>

### *Religious Intolerance*

The Keston News Service reported in January 1999 that Ludmila Alekseeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, named Voronezh one of the five regions that are the least hospitable to religious freedom. Speaking of Russia as a whole, Ms. Alekseeva said, “There is a real trend towards a hardening of the 1997 law on religion and a danger of returning to the norms of the Soviet era.”<sup>29</sup>

*Express-Khronika* reported in February 1999 that the Voronezh Oblast parliament passed a restrictive anti-missionary law. According to an explanatory supplement attached to the law, the local media needs to be “protected from foreign religious expansion.”<sup>30</sup> Deputy Aleksandr Kosyrev (mentioned in the RNU section above) reportedly played a major role in the drafting of this restrictive law and has a great deal of influence over relations between religious organizations and oblast authorities.<sup>31</sup>

Soon afterward, a committee to discuss political and religious extremism was set up in Voronezh by the Presidential Representative to the oblast. Rather than focusing on the RNU, officials on the committee concentrated on the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who were labeled “asocial elements,” and the Mormons, who were called “rich busybodies who stick their noses where they don’t belong.” Governor Shabanov reportedly went to one of the 13 regional conferences that the Witnesses have held in the oblast in order to observe possible illegalities. The Witnesses have expanded rapidly in the oblast and as a result, many local publications have labeled them a “totalitarian sect” and an organization called the Independent Council for Freedom of Conscience has circulated a petition calling for the Witnesses’ activity in the oblast to be prohibited.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Izvestiya*, September 23, 1997.

<sup>28</sup> *Molodoy Kommunar*, May 22, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Keston News Service, January 22, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> *Express-Khronika*, February 15, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta— religii*, July 7, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> *Express Khronika*, September 6, 1999.

According to the U.S. State Department, in June 1998, Canadian evangelist Viktor Hamm of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association was forced to cancel an outdoor preaching event in Voronezh after local authorities denied the local sponsors of the event, the Evangelical Christian-Baptists, permission to hold the event.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Russia, September 9, 1999.