

# EASTERN SIBERIA ECONOMIC REGION





## Republic of Khakassia

Total Population: 586,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

The Republic of Khakassia's governor is Aleksey Lebed, the younger brother of well known political figure and governor of the adjacent region of Krasnoyarsk, Aleksandr Lebed. Khakassia is a major producer of aluminum.

### *Religious Intolerance*

In February 1998, city officials in the capital city of Abakan ordered a local Pentecostal congregation to suspend its missionary and educational activities. The church's programs, which included a Bible school, visits to juvenile detention centers and an international conference for foreign preachers, were characterized by local officials as illegal. Earlier, the republic's advisor on religious affairs had labeled the church as dangerous and accused it of turning people into "bio-robots."<sup>1</sup>

In March 1998, the deacon of a Lutheran church in Tuym was visited and interrogated by local police and the FSB on the suspicion that he is American. Deacon Pavel Zayakin, a native Russian, reported that the investigation was ordered by republic officials after he had hosted Americans in his home, and that he was questioned over the fact that he possesses foreign books.<sup>2</sup>

According to the U.S. State Department, in January and February 1998, the Khakassia Lutheran Church and the Khakassia Christian Center received orders from local officials to stop distributing religious material and to halt religious education. Some members of these churches reported being fired from their jobs, beaten, and even imprisoned for their religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

### *RNU Activity*

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

## Irkutsk Oblast

Total Population: 2,795,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: 4,000-5,000.<sup>4</sup>

Irkutsk's governor, Boris Govorin, is a member of the centrist All-Russia party, an ally of Yuri Luzhkov's Otechestvo party.

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<sup>1</sup> Keston News Service, March 20, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Keston News Service, March 13, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Russia, September 9, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> HIAS.

### *Antisemitic Incidents*

On March 7, 1998 a Jewish cemetery ritual hall was burned to the ground just three days before it was set to open. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, vandals attacked the cemetery, pouring black paint over tombstone portraits and painting swastikas on them. On the gate of the cemetery, the vandals painted, “Everybody gets what they deserve.” The police responded by saying that such cases are rarely solved.<sup>5</sup>

### *Antisemitic media*

In March 1999, the local newspaper *SM Nomer Odin* published an antisemitic article about the widely disliked business and political figure Boris Berezovsky, who is of Jewish origin. Calling him “a Jewish Zeus” and “a typical palace Jew” who has been compared to “the Prince of Darkness,” the author of the article wrote that Mr. Berezovsky follows in the footsteps of Jewish money men like the Rothschilds in his manipulation behind the scenes of national leaders.<sup>6</sup>

### *Xenophobia*

According to the local human rights organization the Irkutsk Charity Foundation for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, which contributed to the joint Moscow Helsinki Group/UCSJ annual report, “The Human Rights Situation in the Russian Federation: 1998”:

In Irkutsk Oblast, despite its remoteness from the center, discrimination against “persons of Caucasian nationality” does exist. In addition to people from the Caucasus, people of Chinese or Mongolian ethnicity are also an irritant for certain circles, including some power structures.

From time to time Irkutsk newspapers suddenly notify readers that in the central market a group of OMON officers, Afghan war veterans or members of the Irkutsk Cossack Army staged a pogrom, beating and dispersing traders of Caucasian nationality. Such events occur infrequently, but they are indicative of instability in this matter.<sup>7</sup>

## **Republic of Tyva**

Total Population: 309,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

One of Russia’s poorest regions, the Republic of Tyva is located on the Mongolian border. The majority of the republic’s population is Tibetan Buddhist. The region is known around the world for three things: its unique tradition of throat singing, the strikingly beautiful postage stamps that were produced here during the Republic of Tyva’s brief period as an independent country in the 1920’s, and the erroneous Soviet era claim still made by local government officials that Tyva is the geographic center of Asia.

<sup>5</sup> Report from M. Torban, chairman of the Jewish National Public Organization, to UCSJ, June 17, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> *SM Nomer Odin*, March 19, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Irkutsk Charity Foundation for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, 1998 report.

*Extremism*

On March 4, 1999 *Itar-Tass* reported that a unit for combating political extremism had been set up within the Department of Internal Affairs of Tyva. According to the Department's spokeswoman Viktoriya Saryg-ool, the unit was set up in reaction to General Albert Makashov's antisemitic comments in order to prevent local "excesses" on ethnic, religious and political grounds. Ms. Saryg-ool was quoted as saying that the new unit has already begun to take preventive measures aimed at averting any illegal actions against Jewish organizations. Reportedly, two of the 127 public organizations registered in the republic are suspected of extremist tendencies.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Itar-Tass*, March 4, 1999.