

# VOLGA-VYATSKY ECONOMIC REGION





## Republic of Chuvashia

Total Population: 1,361,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

The local economy is dominated by tractor building enterprises and enterprises of other machine-building branches, the chlorine production industry, and the cotton and weaving industries. Chuvashia's president, Nikolai Fyodorov, is a member of the centrist All-Russia party, which is allied with Yuri Luzhkov's Otechestvo party.

### *RNU Activity*

The RNU is not registered as a legal organization in the Republic of Chuvashia. In April 1999, the local newspaper *Sovietskaya Chuvashia* reported that the head of the local RNU, Sergei Sergeev, won a lawsuit against a local newspaper which identified him as "the head of the local fascists." Mr. Sergeev successfully claimed in his suit that by calling him a fascist, the newspaper *Ch-Stolitsa* had insulted his honor and dignity. Mr. Sergeev now plans to pursue criminal charges against the journalist in question. *Sovietskaya Chuvashia* strongly criticized the judge's decision and wrote that it opened up many opportunities for the RNU to intimidate journalists and establish a strong position in the republic.<sup>1</sup>

## Kirov Oblast

Total Population: 1,634,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

Kirov Oblast specializes in aviation and military machine building, wood processing and grain production.

### *RNU Activity*

*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported in July 1998 that the RNU has 200 active members in Kirov Oblast and that the RNU's patriotic youth club *Kolovrat* (swastika) operates in the city of Kirov with the support of the Department of Youth Affairs in one of the city's regions, the Military Commisariat, the Inspector for Youth Affairs and the police.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1999, the local newspaper *Nash Variant* reported on how city and oblast authorities have dealt with the Kirov RNU's illegal actions. Recently, three RNU members and a local Orthodox priest were charged with an administrative offense for disrupting a meeting of Adventists in the city of Kotelnich. The city Department of Justice gave the oblast RNU an official warning, at which point the RNU was faced with having its registration revoked if it received a second official warning. However, the Kotelnich District Court threw out the administrative charge and the Oktyabr District Court of the city of Kirov decided in favor of the Kirov RNU's request to have the official warning against it invalidated.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sovietskaya Chuvashia*, April 20, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 9, 1998.

However, at the same time, another case against the RNU was making its way through the courts, this time involving the head of the Kirov city RNU, V. Skvortsov, a doctor who practices in the city. The charges involved an anti-NATO rally which the RNU organized in Kirov without the permission of the city authorities. The Pervomaysky Court threw out the charges, a decision which was overruled by the Kirov Oblast Court, which officially warned Dr. Skvortsov. The Kirov RNU then sent a complaint to the regional Prosecutor's Office, asking that the court decision be reversed. The outcome of that complaint is not known.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Antisemitic Incidents*

On May 6, 1999 leaflets were distributed in Kirov and other Russian cities containing a photograph of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and the head of the Russian Jewish Congress Vladimir Gusinsky, both wearing yarmulkes. Under the photograph, the anonymous writer wrote that Luzhkov's real name is Katz and wrote with indignation, "And this man wants to be Russian President!"<sup>4</sup>

#### *Religious Intolerance*

In June 1999, Keston News Service reported that a press campaign has been started against local Baptists. The flurry of negative articles with titles such as "The Sects are Attacking. Do We Have the Resolve to Fight Back?" are reportedly supported by Aleksandr Balyberdin, the Kirov Oblast plenipotentiary for relations with religious organizations, who has been trying to prevent the Baptists from using the local House of Culture. Mr. Balyberdin reportedly told Keston reporters that the 1997 religion law is too lenient towards "sects."<sup>5</sup>

### **Republic of Mari-El**

Total Population: 766,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

The industrial structure of Mari-El is dominated by the electronics and radio industry. The republic also specializes in grain farming, cattle breeding, and the cultivation of flax. The President of Mari-El, Vyacheslav Kislitsyn, is a member of the pro-Kremlin Union of Right Forces.

In March 1999, Vyacheslav Paydoverov, the coordinator of the Human Rights Center of the Republic of Mari-El, a human rights organization which participates in the Moscow Helsinki Group/UCSJ monitoring project, "Monitoring Human Rights in Russia," was beaten on the street in Yoshkar-Ola and hospitalized with severe trauma to the head and ribs. According to the Human Rights Network, Mr. Paydoverov's colleagues believe that the attack was motivated by his investigations of corruption in the regional administration.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Nash Variant*, May 20, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> *Izvestiya* May 6, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Keston News Service, June 22, 1999.

*RNU Activity*

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

*Religious Intolerance*

In September 1999, Keston News Service reported that city officials in Yoshkar-Ola told a local Baptist congregation that their plans to build a church could no longer go forward. Local Baptists were surprised at this sudden decision by previously friendly city officials, since their congregation is a registered member of the Baptist Union and all of their construction permits are reportedly in order. The congregation had reportedly already spent \$4,000 on construction and were only a few days away from laying the foundation.



**RNU patrol, Mari-El**

Keston News Service quoted local Baptists' claims that the sudden reversal in the city administration's attitude was caused by hostility whipped up by the local Russian Orthodox hierarchy, led by Bishop Ioann, who allegedly complained to the mayor's assistant that Baptists are a sect that cons people and inflicts psychological harm on its members, and who allegedly told a reporter from the local newspaper *Mariyskaya Pravda* that he would do everything he could to stop the church's construction. As a result of the Bishop's stance, local Baptists told Keston News Service that demonstrators holding signs with anti-Baptist slogans started appearing near the construction site and that the fence around the site had been torn down three times. At one point, someone wrote "Death to the Baptists!" on the fence. The city administration has offered the Baptists other locations to build their church, none of which are acceptable.<sup>6</sup>

**Republic of Mordovia**

Total Population: 956,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown.

The republic's economy is dominated by radio, electronic and rubber production. The President of Mordovia, Nikolai Merkushin, is a member of Yuri Luzhkov's Otechestvo party.

*RNU Activity*

Mordovia has a small RNU branch which is unregistered. It is led by Yaroslav Pshenichnikov, a veteran of the war in Chechnya. In April, the local RNU announced its intention to march in the capital city of Saransk. Approximately 20 RNU members intended to march, but the RNU was warned by local law enforcement authorities that since they are unregistered, they do not have the right to march.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Keston News Service, September 29, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> *Vecherny Saransk*, April 22, 1999; *Stolitsa S*, June 4, 1999.

### *Antisemitic Incidents*

According to the Republican Human Rights Center of Mordovia, which contributed to the joint Moscow Helsinki Group/UCSJ annual report, “The Human Rights Situation in the Russian Federation: 1998”:

Antisemitism is demonstrated neither in official policy nor in the media, but in everyday life a considerable number of inhabitants of settlements and towns express in private conversation their discontent at the percentage of Jews occupying higher offices in the President’s circle, in the government, in financial structures, and in the media. On television, by their account, the number of Jews exceeds that of their percentage share of the Russian population. Because of the latent character of these ideas and their insignificance in public life, the authorities of the Republic of Mordovia give no reaction to it.<sup>8</sup>

### *Religious Intolerance*

The Keston News Service reported in January 1999, that Ludmila Alekseeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, named Mordovia 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>9</sup>

## **Nizhny Novgorod Oblast**

Total Population: 3,727,000.

Estimated Jewish Population: Unknown, but often referred to as the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in Russia, behind Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The region specializes in oil refining and petrochemical industries (especially in Kstovo), as well as nitrogen and chlorine production. Nizhny Novgorod’s governor, Ivan Sklyarov, is a member of Yuri Luzhkov’s Otechestvo party.

### *RNU Activity*

The local RNU actively distributes its literature and openly calls for violence against minorities. According to the Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, which contributed to the joint Moscow Helsinki Group/UCSJ annual report, “The Human Rights Situation in the Russian Federation: 1998”: “The main reason for the spreading of ideas of ethnic intolerance is the inactivity of the law enforcement agencies, including prosecutors.”<sup>10</sup>

On November 22, 1998, a local television station reported that the mayor of the city of Kstovo, Vyacheslav Bolyak, had announced that police in his city would cooperate with the RNU by allowing them to patrol the city’s streets to enforce law and order. The head of the local FSB, Sergei Lvov, was quoted in the same broadcast as describing the RNU as, “normal young men who want to see more public order in the city.” The broadcast set off a major scandal. Mayor Bolyak, who

---

<sup>8</sup> Republican Human Rights Center of Mordovia, 1998 report.

<sup>9</sup> Keston News Service, January 22, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.

represents Russia at the Council of Europe, denied collaborating with the RNU. The federal Ministry of Justice began an investigation of mayor Bolyak's ties with the RNU and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a political opponent of mayor Bolyak, asked the Federation Council to look into why the mayor allegedly gave RNU members access to state owned real estate.<sup>11</sup> In September 1999, the Ryazan-based newspaper *Meshcherskaya Storona* reported that police in Kstovo conduct joint raids with RNU members against traders from the Caucasus. Allegedly, even though these raids often end in violence, RNU members are never punished.<sup>12</sup>

On August 1, 1998, over 100 RNU members provided security for and participated in a religious ceremony in the town of Diveevo, allegedly with the permission of the Diveevo Monastery.<sup>13</sup>

The RNU is not registered in the oblast and reportedly has a strong presence in the city of Dzerzhinsk and a weak presence in the city of Nizhny Novgorod.<sup>14</sup> According to the Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, during 1998 the RNU was very active in Dzerzhinsk. RNU newspapers and flyers were widely distributed there and many walls were covered with antisemitic slogans. The RNU also conducted propaganda actions in local schools (it is illegal for political parties and movements to propagandize in schools). Monitors from the Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights report that they do not know of any actions by the city authorities to stop these RNU activities.<sup>15</sup>

In September 1999, *Novye Izvestiya* reported that an RNU meeting in Dzerzhinsk was attended by local law enforcement officials, one of whom, a senior inspector, asked that RNU members help the police deal with unregistered residents from the Caucasus. The RNU passed a resolution at the meeting to "free the oblast from Caucasian aggressors." In response to questions from the media about possible cooperation between the police and the RNU, higher up police officials at first denied that the incident had taken place and later stated that the senior inspector had made a mistake in judgement as a result of having gone three days without sleep. Top police officials have since then consistently denied that any cooperation with the RNU would take place. In the same article, *Novye Izvestiya* reported that as a result of RNU/police cooperation in Kstovo, "pogroms" took place in an Armenian-owned café and at the city market; as a result the RNU had two criminal cases started against it.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Antisemitic Incidents*

On July 3, 1998, the local newspaper *Delo* reported that an elderly man was thrown to his death off of a bridge by two young men who mistakenly thought he was Jewish.<sup>17</sup>

In October 1998, Zalman Yoffe, the chief rabbi of Nizhny Novgorod, was beaten by two unidentified attackers. He was taken to the hospital with head injuries. In a statement relayed to the press

<sup>11</sup> EWI *Russian Regional Report*, December 17, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> *Meshcherskaya Storona*, September 15, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.

<sup>14</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 9, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.

<sup>16</sup> *Novye Izvestiya*, September 24, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> *Delo*, July 3, 1998.

through his wife, Rabbi Yoffe said that the incident was clearly an antisemitic attack. The police said they would “take all necessary measures” to find the suspects. However, there have been no reports of any arrests in connection with this assault.<sup>18</sup>

In 1998, the local branch of the LDPR reportedly published antisemitic articles in its newspaper *LDPR*. A petition protesting this incitement of antisemitism was sent to the oblast Prosecutor’s Office, which charged the local LDPR with violating Article 282 of the Criminal Code (“incitement of ethnic hatred”). These charges, however, were dropped and a complaint against the decision of the Prosecutor’s Office was denied by the Nizhny Novgorod District Court on December 1, 1998. Governor Sklyarov stated that the LDPR’s antisemitic publications should be met with “quiet contempt.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Xenophobia*

Reportedly, the rights of people from the Caucasus or Asian countries to freely choose a place to live are frequently violated by authorities in the oblast.<sup>20</sup>

### *Religious Intolerance*

According to the Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, there was more tolerance towards “non-traditional” religions (meaning faiths other than the Russian Orthodox Church) in 1998 than in previous years. However, clear violations of religious liberty continue. In some instances, “non-traditional” religions were denied the right to rent buildings for services or other community functions. In addition, the local newspaper *Delo* published an article on October 23, 1998 which accused the Jehovah’s Witnesses of being a “totalitarian sect.”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> JTA, October 15, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.

<sup>20</sup> Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.

<sup>21</sup> Nizhny Novgorod Society for Human Rights, 1998 report.