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Those who care about the future of democracy in Russia view with anxiety recent reports from Moscow concerning: the growing arrogance of organized crime; the activation of the Russian nazis; and the activities of the authorities and of all those institutions that are supposed to protect Russian citizens, their rights and freedoms, and the fragile growths of Russian democracy.

Obviously, public attention in Russia will focus on these issues during the next parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for 1995 and 1996, respectively. However, at this point it is unclear whether the elections will take place as scheduled in accordance with the Constitution. So far, most politicians, both in the presidential camp and in opposition, claim publicly that voting will take place on time, while privately agreeing that Yel'tsin's inner circle will try to postpone the elections.

The country was still reeling after the assassination of the well-known TV anchorman and executive, Vladislav Listyev, when it heard the news of the murder of the well-known businessman, Oleg Zverev. The elimination of prominent Russian figures, particularly of members of so-called "business circles," has long been part of everyday life, and according to the politician Grigori Yavlinsky, the death of Listyev was the 19th "contract hit" by hired assassins since the beginning of this year. Yet this is only part of the picture. According to data published by Ogonek in March of 1995, law enforcement agencies reported that 2,632,700 crimes were committed in Russia during 1994, with 7,800 cases of murder remaining unsolved.(1) In Moscow, 1,820 persons were killed in
1994 (an average of 5 murders a day), while only in 36.5 percent of the cases did investigation lead to the identification or arrest of the murderer.(2)

As a result, 71 percent of all Russian citizens, according to a poll conducted by the Russian Parliamentary Sociology Institute, are convinced that their state and their government are neither trying nor able to protect them; 59 percent claim that they constantly fear for their lives and the lives of their relatives; while 21 percent state that they feel unsafe even in their apartments or homes. More than one-third of those polled are convinced that the government is acting only in the interests of various criminal structures, including the mafia, while 43 percent believe already that all power in the country belongs to organized crime—the mafia.(3)

Various "nazi" and "fascist" elements are being activated across the country and, in most cases, these groups either act openly and without any fear of being prosecuted, or receive very mild and even almost favorable treatment from those who are supposed to prosecute them in accordance with existing laws and the Constitution. Following his first acquittal for publication of Hitler's Mein Kampf, the well-known St. Petersburg anti-Semite, Viktor Bezverkhi, was acquitted again. This time, he was taken to court for the publication of his own book, The History of Religion, which contained appeals to carry out Hitler's "final solution" and eliminate all Jews. The time of the trial coincided with the convention in St. Petersburg of the openly fascist People's Social Party, which had raised money to provide legal protection for Bezverkhi during his trial.(4)

Aleksei Vedenkin, one of the self-proclaimed leaders of Russian National Unity, another fascist group in Moscow, was released from Lefortovo prison on March 24. A month earlier, in a February 22 interview on Ostankino television, Vedenkin had threatened to kill personally two democratically minded Duma deputies and human rights activists—Sergei Kovalev and Sergei Yushenkov. A week later he was arrested at the initiative of the acting Russian prosecutor general, but the officials of the Moscow City Court saw no reason to keep him in detention.(5) Street kiosks and shops in Moscow are filled with such items as rings, chains, and t-shirts emblazoned with swastikas and inscriptions like
"European tour 1939-1945."(6) Under the circumstances, Yel'tsin's decree of March 1995, aimed at combating fascist and extremist groups in Russia, seemed to be timely, if not belated.(7) Yet this decree has not generated any significant response from the major political parties, and has remained almost unnoticed by Russia's democratic media.

One of the reasons for this silence is the fact that many presidential decrees exist only on paper, and are never enacted. Partially as a result (as the poll mentioned earlier demonstrated), most Russians do not believe that their government and law enforcement agencies will do anything meaningful to improve the current situation and to protect them from domestic threats. On the other hand, many fear any attempt to strengthen the repressive character of their government: Memories of the police state, and especially the notorious KGB, are still fresh in the minds of millions of Russians.

Boris Yel'tsin on April 3 signed the bill "On the Federal Security Service" that was adopted by the State Duma; however, most of its provisions had been disseminated previously by the Russian and Western media. This new law gives the FSK--the so-called legal successor of the KGB, which in the process of reorganization is supposed to change its name to Federal Security Service (FSS)--a great deal of power even when compared with "the old days of the Soviet Union." This law allows the security service to break into the homes and offices of Russian citizens, to open private mail and to place spies inside state agencies and private companies. In fact, the law allows the security service to cover the entire country with a network of informants who will be paid for information provided.(8) What is new, even compared with the Soviet past, is the token role given to the prosecutor's office. For example, under the law, the security service can spy on persons, businesses and other government agencies on mere suspicion of subversion or criminal activity. No proof of such suspicion is required, and the service only has to notify the prosecutor's office of a forcible entry into someone's property 24 hours after the event, while the prosecutor is powerless to challenge this notification.(9) Even during the Soviet period, the KGB was supposed to notify the prosecutor's office
about similar steps in *advance*, although this "formality," of course, was hardly ever observed.

The security service not only is regaining all the power needed to conduct investigations, run prisons and command special armed anti-riot units; the law allows it also to conduct intelligence operations abroad.(10)

As in the past, one of the main tasks of the security service is to combat organized crime. On the one hand, this does seem natural for an agency that includes well-armed and well-trained professionals; however, one should not disregard the population's traditional fears of the role of the security organs, and a number of existing realities. Aleksei Vedenkin, leader of the neofascist Russian National Unity, was not merely boasting when he claimed that "90 percent of all the employees of the highest and second echelons of the special services belong to our people."(11) In addition, the creation of this old/new security service might again concentrate too much power in the hands not only of certain agencies, but also of specific individuals. As reported by Aleksandr Platkovsky in *Izvestiya*, the law might lead toward the creation of "some sort of super-organ upon which the president could rely. The need for this organ will continue to grow, especially in light of the coming elections, or cancellation of the elections. It is also believed that the FSS would unite under its roof the FSK and the Chief Government Protection Department headed by Mikhail Barsukov. In this case, there is no doubt that this new special service would be headed...by General Barsukov."(12)

The role of Mikhail Barsukov, a close ally and personal friend of Yel'tsin's chief bodyguard Aleksandr Korzhakov, is viewed by Russian democrats as sinister in part because of his support of Russia's aggressive war in Chechnya. Among those who accused Barsukov's department of wiretapping the telephones and offices of the government and presidential staff were Vladimir Kvasov, former head of the government apparatus, and Sergei Filatov, Yel'tsin's chief of staff, who said that "everyone [in the Presidential administration] believes that the phones and offices are tapped. I also think so."(13) In another interview, with the popular Russian weekly *Argumenty i Fakty*,
Filatov said that, as chief of staff, he had no control over Barsukov's department and that even in his office "most of the employees use pen and paper to write notes to each other...if it is true, if they are collecting files against us...it is really terrible even to think about the possible implications...that's what causes my intuitive worries and concerns."(14)

In addition, the Russian president's reaction to Listyev's assassination also caused concern. In his speech to the employees of Ostankino, Yeltsin called for law enforcement officials to follow the example of their colleagues in Uzbekistan, where members of certain gangs had been shot without any trial (as most of the Russian papers reported later, President Yeltsin made a mistake--the gangs were executed in Turkmenistan, under the orders of the "father of all Turkmenians" President Saparmyrat Niyazarov). Still, his words were immediately supported by some prominent representatives of the Russian public, such as film actress Liudmila Gurchenko, who, in a TV interview broadcast the same day, stated that "if people get killed under democracy, we do not need democracy in this country at all."(15) A story in Izvestiya concerning Yeltsin's promise of a crackdown appeared under the headline: "We have all the reasons to be afraid of the creation of a police state."(16) Vitaly Tretyakov, editor-in-chief of Nezavisimaya gazeta, asked in an article: "Why should we do it as they do it in Uzbekistan, and why can't we try to do it as they do it, let's say, in France?"(17) These attitudes led Izvestiya to post another front-page headline: "Under a new name, the old KGB is being recreated."(18)

The strengthening of the special services, as well as growing fears that their new powers would only allow them further to violate human rights, and to return to the practice of persecuting political opponents, are causing deep concern among those who care about Russian democracy's fate. At the same time, the obvious split among the leading democratic parties and groups in Russia has rendered them impotent to consolidate their forces and to confront attempts to curb the fragile achievements of Russian democracy. The fact that today the three major democratic groups and parties--Yegor Gaidar's "Russia's Democratic Choice," Grigori Yavlinsky's, Yuri Boldyrev's, and
Vladimir Lukin's "Yabloko," and Boris Fyodorov's "Forward Russia!"—refuse to coordinate their policies and to enter into an electoral alliance significantly weakens all Russian democratic forces, and, in case elections are held, may allow their opponents to come to power. As Izvestiya put it in another front-page headline: "The reformists must know: if the elections take place tomorrow, the winners would be communists and their allies."(19) It seems quite unrealistic to hope that some other reformist groups and parties, such as Sergei Shakrai's "Party of Russian Unity and Concord" or Aleksandr Yakovlev's "Social-Democratic Party" would be in a position to gain many votes.

Under the circumstances, not only a number of key Yeltsin allies but also some of the representatives of Russian big business, such as Oleg Boyko, director of the Olbi investment company and president of the National Credit Bank, have begun to fear the potential results of elections and to explore the possibility of postponing both parliamentary and presidential ballots. Boyko's initiative has also won the support of another powerful banker—Aleksandr Smolensky, president of the Stolichny bank.(20)

It is expected that most of the Russian democratic parties and movements, together with the opposition, will try to persuade the president and his administration not to postpone the elections, even though some of them understand that their forces are much too divided to win. However, such presidential policies as the ongoing war in Chechnya, his alliance with the power ministries, and the fear that a new police state is being created, have eroded support for Yeltsin among democratic and pro-reform forces. Without this support, the president will find it difficult to implement some of his plans and ideas. He will be in a position to renew the dialogue with the Russian democrats only if he takes the first step in their direction and if he convinces them that all their fears concerning the creation of a police state are groundless as long as Yeltsin remains in charge.

Notes:
1 Yevgeni Lisov, "Militsiya i Prestupnost': Kto Kogo?," Ogonek, 5-10 March 1995, pp. 51-52.
12 Aleksandr Platkovsky, op. cit., p. 2.
14 "Filatov v Kremle," *Argumenty i Fakty*, no. 9, 1995, p. 3.
17 Vitaly Tretyakov, op. cit., p. 1.