



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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9 June 2004

### RUS42684.E

Russia: Information on the Russian National Unity (RNU or RNE) political party, including size, influence, activities, relations with government

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

This Response provides additional information to that found in RUS40057.E of 28 October 2002 on the Russian National Unity political party (RNU, RNE) in Murmansk, RUS37628.E of 26 September 2001 on the RNU in Novorossiysk, RUS35271.FE of 23 August 2000 on the activities and political ideology of the RNU, RUS35390.E of 22 August 2000 on the RNU in St. Petersburg and RUS34333.E of 1 May 2000 on the influence of RNU in southeast Russia.

A Moscow Helsinki Group 2002 report on nationalist groups in Russia details the RNU program in which "members pursue aggressive anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-Semitism, cherish ideals of a pure Russian nation...and Russian spiritual values" (MHG 2002). The report states that RNU members imitate the German Nazis by using a stylized swastika among their symbols, by greeting each other in a manner similar to that used by Nazis and by wearing a black uniform (ibid.). RNU members also exercise to develop their physical strength, and practice shooting (ibid.). They publish and distribute the newspaper *Russian Order* (Russkiy Poryadok) as well as some regional publications (ibid.).

### Size

According to the Moscow Helsinki Group, in the mid 1990s there were approximately 15,000 active RNU members in Russia, but in 2000 membership decreased since the group split into a number of factions (MHG 2002). Moscow Helsinki Group reported in 2002 that two main fragments of the former RNU accounted for 2,000 to 3,000 members each (ibid.). In April 2002, deputy chief of the Russian Preventive Operations Department reported that the number of active RNU members had been rising (ITAR TASS 10 Apr. 2002) and although the United Kingdom Home Office considered membership figures unreliable, it reported that the RNU claimed tens of thousands of members in many regions of Russia (UK Apr. 2002). Also in 2002, ITAR-TASS news agency reported that there were twenty-two RNU associations operating in the Russian Federation (ITAR TASS 23 Oct. 2002) and the *FSU Monitor* stated that the Astrakhan Region's RNU branch had 500 members (*FSU Monitor* 5 Feb. 2002). No further information on the size of the Russian National Unity could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### Influence

The split of the RNU in 2000 (RFE/RL 4 Apr. 2001) produced several fragment groups such as Russian Revival and Slavonic Union, which were in conflict with each other (MHG 2002). Furthermore, some regional groups operated independently, while others were in touch with alternate "RN[U] management" (ibid.). *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* stated that the RNU had lost influence in some regions of Russia since the height of its popularity in 1998 (18 Dec. 2003) and in a 2002 report on nationalist groups in Russia, the Moscow Helsinki Group concurred that the 1990s were the height of RNU activities. According to an *Izvestiya* article that appeared in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, by mid-2002 a national RNU organization no longer existed (28 Aug. 2002). In the same article, and the spokesman for Russia's chief rabbi noted no decline in the activities of the RNU (ibid.).

Results of political polls conducted in Russia in June 2002 and July 2002 showed that the RNU party could win two per cent of the vote were an election to be held (Vremya 2 Aug. 2002; Interfax 19 June 2002). Despite this reported loss of influence on a national scale, the UK Home Office 2002 report for the Russian Federation stated that the RNU continued to be active on a regional level (Apr. 2002) and according to the Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press and the *FSU Monitor*, the Khabarovsk branch of the RNU was one of the "largest and most powerful" RNU groups in Russia in 2002 (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press 28 Aug. 2002; *FSU Monitor* 1 Aug.

2002). Although 2004 reports reveal that the RNU party no longer exists in the city of Voronezh, results of a poll done there showed that the opinions of fifty-five percent of the respondents reflected RNU ideological principles, such as striving towards a "pure Russian nation" (MHG 2002), since these respondents thought it was necessary to restrict immigration to the city using all possible means (*Izvestia* 11 Feb. 2004).

## Activities

According to a 2002 Moscow Helsinki Group report on nationalist groups in Russia, local RNU groups coordinate their activities at the regional and inter-regional level and regional organizations operate in "most" of the regions of Russia.

## Western Russia

*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* reported that the RNU were hostile toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians and active in some regions such as Voronezh (18 Dec. 2003). In 2004, two sources noted that in the 1990s Voronezh was a stronghold of a "now largely defunct" RNU (*Bigotry Monitor* 7 May 2004; *Izvestia* 11 Feb. 2004). According to *Izvestiya*, activities of the RNU in Voronezh include holding congresses and plastering leaflets on poles, even though the RNU is officially not registered there (11 Feb. 2004). Results of a study of extremist groups done by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (UCSJ) in 2002 showed that the RNU accompanied local police in Voronezh, Bryansk and Yaroslavl in their patrols of train stations and local streets to "keep order" (*New York Times* 1 June 2002).

According to a report by the Agency for Jewish News, vandals broke all windows of the first floor of a Jewish school in Bryansk in September 2003 and painted the stylized swastika symbol of the RNU on a wall (*FSU Monitor* 12 Sept. 2003). The *FSU Monitor* reported in 2002 that in Burmakino in the Yaroslavl region, RNU members purchased explosives, recruited local youth as well as threatened and "terrorized" Jews and people from the Caucasus (*ibid.* 6 Feb. 2002).

Despite Moscow's ban on it, as of 2002 evidence of the RNU's continued influence in the city was evident in the openly displayed uniforms and symbols of its members who continued to hold rallies, distribute leaflets with contact info (*Bigotry Monitor* 8 Mar. 2002; *ibid.* 21 Dec. 2001) and post RNU leaflets in public places around the city (*ibid.* 8 Feb. 2002). Arminfo News Agency reported on 25 October 2002 that RNU members had been appearing in Moscow and suggested that this was possibly in response to the hostage-taking incident in Moscow in October 2002, but justification for this explanation was not given. By 2002, some members of the RNU had allegedly joined military units around Chechnya (*FSU Monitor* 17 Mar. 2002).

In Tver and Nizhny Novgorod, human rights groups protested when Russian Rebirth, a fragment group of the RNU, registered as a social organization (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003). Although the RNU was established in the Astrakhan region in 1999, there were no officially registered nationalist organizations there in early 2002, but unregistered nationalist groups were active according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (*FSU Monitor* 5 Feb. 2002). The RNU in the Astrakhan region meets weekly and promotes the position of Russians, Tatars and Kazakhs while being hostile towards immigrants and people from the Caucasus (*ibid.*).

In a 2002 letter to the Governor of Kostroma region, the chief rabbi of Russia and UCSJ claimed that RNU members were attacking Jews and recruiting youth in schools (*FSU Monitor* 6 Feb. 2002; *Bigotry Monitor* 1 Feb. 2002). This is corroborated by *International Religious Freedom Report 2003*, which also reported that the RNU recruited new members in Kostroma region in 2002 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003). The RNU has also allegedly committed attacks against Jews and conducted other anti-Semitic activity in Nerekhta in Kostroma region, including the spreading of anti-Semitic literature and racist audio and video cassettes (Interfax 7 Feb. 2002), as well as distributed RNU leaflets there (*Bigotry Monitor* 1 Feb. 2002; AP 7 Feb. 2002; Interfax 7 Feb. 2002), booby-trapped signs bearing anti-Semitic messages with explosive devices, (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003) and painted buildings with anti-Semitic graffiti (AP 7 Feb. 2002; Interfax 7 Feb. 2002). In January 2002, in the village of Loparevo in the Kostroma region, RNU members reportedly attacked a Jewish teenager leaving him with a concussion and other injuries (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003; *Bigotry Monitor* 1 Feb. 2002).

In the Krasnodar region, RNU and anti-Semitic graffiti appeared in Krasnodar city (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003) and in July 2002 in Sochi, a member of the RNU was arrested at a train station because he had allegedly picked up a package that contained TNT (*Bigotry Monitor* 19 July 2002). Activities of the RNU in the city of Rostov na Donu in Rostov Region were also cited by *FSU Monitor*, but details were not given (*FSU Monitor* 19 May 2004).

RNU leaflets calling for "racial hygiene" were distributed in Petrozavodsk, Karelia republic in 2002 (*FSU Monitor* 8 April 2002).

In June 2003, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan banned the activities of the RNU after the RNU branch there had been given orders to stop using Nazi symbols and distributing racist literature (*FSU Monitor* 12 June 2003). In 2002, *FSU Monitor* reported that some small breakaway groups from the main party are active in southern Russia (17 Mar. 2002).

### Central Russia

In 2003, the RNU reportedly placed leaflets that accused President Putin of allowing the United States to secure Russian nuclear sites into thousands of mailboxes in Yekaterinburg (FBIS 2 Sept. 2003). In Chelyabinsk, the RNU allegedly painted graffiti on building walls (*Bigotry Monitor* 14 May 2004).

RNU members reportedly openly distributed their free newspaper *Russian Order* in 2002, (*FSU Monitor* 7 October 2002), as well as leaflets provoking racial hatred and materials containing stylized Nazi symbols (*ibid.*; RFE/RL 11 Oct. 2002). According to the Do-Info news agency of Omsk oblast, RNU members temporarily participated in discussions held among political organizations in Omsk, which were chaired by the governor of Omsk (*FSU Monitor* 4 Sept. 2002). In Kemerovo in February 2003, RNU members allegedly assaulted a 15 year-old Jewish boy who subsequently required hospitalization (Tel Aviv University 2 Feb. 2004.).

### Eastern Russia

RNU members dressed in black reportedly walked around Khabarovsk, distributing leaflets and brochures, which according to the Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press were "politically incorrect" (28 Aug. 2002). The RNU branch in Kamchatka supported the action by Russian traders to drive Chinese traders out of the market there in 2002 (*FSU Monitor* 1 Mar. 2002). In March 2003, the BBC reported that a swastika, along with the RNU signature, was painted on a synagogue in Krasnoyarsk (RTR 3 Mar. 2003).

### Relations with Government

*Bigotry Monitor* stated in 2002 that the RNU in Nerekhta carried out its activities without being stopped by the police because the chief of police and the head of the local RNU branch there were former classmates (1 Feb. 2002). According to *FSU Monitor*, the governor of Kamchatka attended an RNU rally in 2001 (1 Mar. 2002) and in Kostroma in 2002, the chief of police was allegedly an RNU sympathizer (6 Feb. 2002). The UCSJ monitor in Krasnoyarsk region stated that the local Federal Security Bureau believe[d] that the RNU [wa]s "passive" and that vandalism carried out on a Krasnoyarsk Synagogue was probably carried out by youth (*Bigotry Monitor* 28 Dec. 2001).

Although some Russian authorities appear to have supported the RNU (*FSU Monitor* 1 Mar. 2002; *ibid.* 6 Feb. 2002), in 2002, the Ministry of the Interior expressed its concern with the activities of the RNU (ITAR TASS 2 Apr. 2002; *FSU Monitor* 4 Apr. 2002), citing it as one of the main extremist groups in Russia in 2002 (*ibid.*). In 2002 the Russian Ministry of Justice set out to re-register all political parties in Russia and despite its extreme nature, according to one of the members of the Liberal Russia party, because RNU was not acting in direct opposition to the ruling party RNU would probably be granted a legal address (while Liberal Russia would not) (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 3 July 2002). Russian courts eradicated six RNU branches in 2002 (ITAR TASS 23 Oct. 2002). The same occurred in 2003: six regional branches of the RNU were closed down, reportedly for distributing material inciting racial, ethnic and religious conflict (*ibid.* 18 Feb. 2003; *Economic Press Review* 19 Feb. 2003). In the opinion of a journalist writing for *Rossiiskie Vesti*,

...[S]trong pressure is applied to any organizations or leaders that might one day be capable of becoming a nationwide phenomenon ... A characteristic example of this was Russian National Unity - broken up from within, it ceased to exist within six months (18 June 2003)

The office of the local division of the RNU in Khabarovsk city was closed by a court order in 2002 (AP 24 Dec. 2002; RFE/RL 11 Oct. 2002; *FSU Monitor* 1 Aug. 2002). *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* reported on 6 February 2003 that the RNU was banned from the territory of Khabarovsk region by a court order; this was the fourth region to have its RNU organization banned following closures in Moscow city, Sverdlovsk Oblast and the Republic of Karelia (*FSU Monitor* 1 Aug. 2002). The RNU in Khabarovsk allegedly had been using symbols not approved by its own charter, such as the stylized swastika, and prior to July 2002, it had been ordered to suspend its activities for a period of six months for the purpose of aligning its actions with its charter, something the organization ultimately failed to do (RusData Dialine 31 July 2002; RIA 30 July 2002; *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 28 Aug. 2002; *FSU Monitor* 1 Aug. 2002).

Sources reported in 2002 and 2003 that Moscow city and Karelia region authorities limited the activities of the RNU by not registering the groups (UK Apr. 2002; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003). The *FSU Monitor*, however, stated that the RNU Moscow branch was banned for its "fascist and anti-Semitic views" (17 March 2002). In 2002, police detained a leader of the RNU in Moscow for allegedly posting

RNU leaflets (*Bigotry Monitor* 8 Feb. 2002) and on 23 October 2002, ITAR TASS reported that a court decision had abolished the Moscow RNU association.

The RNU organization in Omsk was ordered to close by a regional court order in 2002 (IPR Middle East News 6 May 2004; *FSU Monitor* 7 Oct. 2002; RFE/RL 11 Oct. 2002), after the court found that the RNU was acting illegally in its use of Nazi symbols and disseminating leaflets inciting racial strife (NTV 10 Oct. 2002). In November 2003, the Russian Federation Committee for Financial Monitoring included the RNU branch in Omsk in its list of those suspected of being involved in "extremist" activity (Economic Press Review 14 Nov. 2003; ITAR TASS 13 Nov. 2003) and forwarded this information to Russian banks, which would then have the authority to freeze any financial assets of the groups on the list (*ibid.*).

Two members of the RNU in the Udmurtiya republic were charged with inciting ethnic hatred by the republic's Prosecutor's office in April 2002 (*FSU Monitor* 7 May 2002). They had allegedly distributed an underground newspaper called *Izhevsk Division* at sports events, and were facing a possible prison sentence under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code, which prohibits incitement of ethnic and religious hatred (*ibid.*).

According to a human rights non-governmental organization in Astrakhan, members of the RNU "try to avoid relations with the government there" (*FSU Monitor* 5 Feb. 2002).

Prosecutors attempted to ban the RNU in Tomsk in 2002 (RFE/RL 11 Oct. 2002), and the Ministry of Justice in Tomsk announced in June 2002 that it was trying to ban the RNU there since it had "committed a number of violations of federal law on public associations when registering in the region" and since RNU had not reacted to warnings given by the Tomsk prosecutor and the local office of the Ministry of Justice in connection with distribution of leaflets and failure to file certain documents with Ministry (RFE/RL 14 June 2002).

A journalist for *Izvestiya*, as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press in August 2002 wrote that an "official ban on [the] RNU will change absolutely nothing. The men in black will continue to stroll around the city just as freely, handing out politically incorrect leaflets and brochures" (28 Aug. 2002). The author of *Nazism in Russia* concurred and stated that despite the fact that

[the] RNU has already been banned in Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Karelia ... in all of those places the organization has continued to function without any trouble. After the court bans were imposed on the RNU chapters, their leaders either changed the group's name...or else just went right on operating, saying that RNU was a public organization and didn't need to be registered (*ibid.*)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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