

Street gangs in Kazan: dilemmas of disorder?

Recent reports of street gangs in the UK give added interest to the story of how street gangs have developed in Russia. Svetlana Stephenson of London Metropolitan University has been researching the position in one city, Kazan. Here she describes briefly some of her findings.

The period of the collapse of Soviet state socialism and the birth of a new capitalist society, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, is often characterised in Russia as a time of *bespredel* (limitlessness or disorder), an absence of any moral or legal regulation of social life. Members of mafia groups, so-called *banditi*, and street gangs of young people seemed to represent a frightening new reality and to reflect a slide into the rule of unbridled greed, violence and brutal force.

Juvenile delinquents became important players in informal and criminal markets, some joining organised crime as they grew older. They soon established their own violent control over local turf. While large businesses (such as supermarkets) did not fall under their jurisdiction, small companies and individual entrepreneurs (e.g. those wanting to open up a kiosk or a parking lot within a gang's territory) had to pay dues to the gangs. Youth gangs controlled illegal parking lots, drug trafficking networks and street prostitution in their territory.

Organised street criminal groups became particularly prominent in the cities in the Volga area, with one city – Kazan, the capital of the autonomous Republic of Tatarstan – becoming notorious for its gang problem. According to police estimates, at the end of the 1980s every third young man aged 12–18 was a member of a territorial youth group. By the end of the 1990s gang membership had subsided, and recent research indicates that about eight per cent of young people of school age are members.



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GANGS IN KAZAN

Nevertheless, current and former gang members who have turned into quasi-legitimate businessmen and politicians without losing their past connections represent a powerful force in the city.

Among the key conclusions of the research was that street organisations first emerge as a response to the vulnerability of young people in the unregulated space of the streets and the presence of other groups (such as older criminals and banditi) competing for pieces of the 'action' in the lawless street environment. By organising, young people believe (often against obvious evidence to the contrary) that they can achieve greater security. Those young people who are not gang members must inevitably make a decision on their own position vis-à-vis the gang. As one of our own informants, Ispug, 26, said, 'Not being from a gang, I found it difficult to defend my right to live as I wanted, and that is why I decided that it would make sense to join'. In the words of Nosok, 19, 'The gang exists so that the guys become strong. When you are on your own, you are a weakling, but when you are in a group with others, you are a power, and everybody respects you.'

Group members feel protected from unmotivated attacks by other gangs and particularly against attacks by non-gang members, as violence against a gang member brings possible collective retribution. Having successfully organised themselves into what sociologist Vadim Volkov calls a 'violence-wielding agency', the groups can then pursue other economic and even political aims. They come to control the informal street economy and produce leaders who sometimes become prominent local politicians.

When a gang turns into an economic enterprise, this tends to limit the extreme and unregulated violence which characterised the period when the emerging gangs battled for supremacy. Established gangs do not want trouble with the police and disruption of their business. Both local residents and law and order representatives we interviewed agreed that the gangs bring certain benefits for the city, limiting bespredel. For example, as Airat, an 18-year-old local resident and non-member, told us, 'I would say that the gangs do not like bespredel. If the gangs did not exist, there would be more violence and bespredel. If there were no organised criminal groups, people would still do what these groups do. But the gang members at least control the situation somewhat, and do not let others commit certain acts, for example, mug, rob and beat up pensioners.'

The head of the investigative department of a police precinct told us, 'In the gang structure, all contact between the youths and the seniors happens through supervisors, i.e. those who control each age group in the gang. We use the same idea ourselves, so that, for example, when juniors start to play around and create problems and misunderstandings, I just call the supervisor and say, 'You've got this, that and the other going on: deal with the problem!' If it doesn't work,

we call an even more senior overseer and tell him about it. Usually, that's enough.' A system of mutual accommodation emerges between the local community, law enforcement agencies and the gangs. In the absence of effective state regulation, in deprived areas of the city this system creates a modicum of order (albeit at a high social cost).

Our research has demonstrated once again that the problems of youth violence and disorder are extremely complex and cannot be explained by individual or family pathologies. In Russia a crisis of state institutions and the abandonment of youth to the vagaries of street life coincided with the proliferation of violent street organisations.



A version of this article with academic references can be found on the BEARR website at http://www.bearr.org/en/information/Aug_2007/Gangs/Kazan. Some of the research findings were published (in Russian) in Stephenson, S. (2006), 'Kazanskii Leviathan: molodyozhnie territorialnie gruppirovki i Problema Sotsialnogo Poriadka' [The Kazan Leviathan: Youth street gangs and the problem of social order], *Otechestvennie Zapiski*, vol. 30, No.3, pp. 97–110.

CONTACT DETAILS

Dr Svetlana Stephenson
Senior Lecturer in Comparative Sociology
London Metropolitan University
Ladbroke House
62-66 Highbury Grove
London N5 2AD
tel: 0207 1335030
email: s.stephenson@londonmet.ac.uk

Photos are from the website www.bidla.net. They do not purport to show actual gang members or any of the people referred to in this article.

Helping to resolve conflict in the North Caucasus

Chris Hunter
Chief Executive Officer,
Peacebuilding UK

Pacebuilding UK (full name 'Centre for Peacebuilding and Community Development') is a UK charity that supports and builds local capacity for peace, to date primarily in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. Our aim, together with our local partners, is to assist people whose lives have been affected by a decade of war, instability and human rights abuses. Our response to this includes running psychosocial assistance and 'peace building', and human rights and community development programmes. We aspire to help people to rebuild their communities and lives and to develop the necessary conditions for peace, development and reconciliation.

Specific projects include a legal aid centre in Grozny, the reconstruction of schools in Chechnya and long-term support to the 'Daimohk' children's dance ensemble and the projects described below. Our main local partner is a Russian charitable fund of the same name, which has offices in Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, and employs around 50 people.

Peace building network

Our local partner has created a network of people engaged in peace building activities in six republics in the North Caucasus. The network promotes dialogue, understanding and reconciliation through training in conflict resolution, tolerance and peace building, and through bringing young people and other groups from different regions together for round tables, camps or joint projects. It aims to strengthen links and improve communication between NGOs in the North Caucasus republics so that they can share experience and information, engage in joint projects and reduce their isolation. Training people in conflict resolution and conflict transformation techniques, including good communication skills, is important to equip people with the tools to build peace. The experience of Peacebuilding UK and our partners shows that many people in the North Caucasus, from school pupils and students to road police and local government representatives, are keen



Aslan conducting art work with his Little Star group in Grozny

to learn and see the usefulness of such tools. This network and the training work that we do is a natural forum to bring people together for dialogue, offering a common focus and cause.

Little Star

Since 1996, the Little Star project has provided psychosocial assistance for children traumatised by war in Chechnya. The project at present employs 12 local counsellors, who are mostly qualified practical psychologists who have also received training from international specialists. They work with groups of children and young people, in consultation with schools, and carry out psychosocial rehabilitation through music, art, drama, games and individual consultations. Positively and creatively addressing the psychological stress and trauma resulting from violence over the last decade in the North Caucasus is essential if people are to recover from the traumatic effects of the conflicts. Symptoms such as depression, hyperactivity, lack of concentration and sleeplessness are addressed by the counsellors' work to provide a safe, supportive and loving space where children can play and interact with each other and adults in new and affirming ways.

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The BEARR Trust Small Grants Scheme 2007

Funding under The BEARR Trust Small Grants Scheme 2007 was divided among three projects. The first has completed its first year and will be continuing into a second. The other two are still under way. Below we print a full report on the project to help orphans leaving the Children's Community at Kitezh and moving on into higher and further education, and a brief summary of the other projects. The 2007 Scheme is funded by a grant from the Moscow office of the law firm Baker Botts.

Growing up, moving on ... with help from BEARR

by Francesca Hewitt, who represents Kitezh Children's Community and Ecologia Youth Trust in Moscow

With a heavy heart, foster parents at Kitezh waved farewell to six teenagers in September 2006. These youngsters had been living in the foster family village for several years, having moved to Kitezh from local orphanages. Over the preceding weeks, teachers and foster parents had been travelling to Kaluga and Moscow to secure places for the youngsters at technical colleges and institutes, according to their skills, abilities and interests and the facilities provided by the institutions. The children were moving on from life as residents and schoolchildren in rural, safe Kitezh to further education in nearby cities.

This new stage for Kitezh and its children has been turbulent and trying, but also rewarding. One of the foster parents' major concerns was that the students who had grown up in Kitezh should still feel supported and continue to see Kitezh as home, returning for holidays and weekends to catch up with their families and friends. The level of independence granted by life in a students' hostel was considered a double-edged sword, a worry for parents if a joy for fun-loving teens. And so it turned out: the hostels have strict curfews; each individual helps keep the living space clean and tidy; and absences from college classes are duly noted and punished.

Speaking in May to Andrei, studying at the Institute for Railway Technology in Kaluga, I realized what a shock to the system moving away from community life must be. He described cooking, cleaning, shopping and washing for himself: all things done communally in Kitezh. But he did not dwell on difficulties arising from new challenges.

The Small Grants Scheme 2008

The 2008 Scheme will continue the theme of homelessness and reintegration, but will also be extended to cover other topics. Details will be announced towards the end of 2007, and will be available on the BEARR Trust website, www.bearr.org

He was well enough prepared for them through life in Kitezh. What he was not ready for was his sadness at leaving his childhood behind and the sense of regret that he had probably moved away from home too hastily. Life in the city is hard, and he is managing with the moral and financial support of Kitezh. But he realizes that, without this support, his future might not look so rosy. He has difficulty motivating himself to study away from the small classes and individualized approach to education in Kitezh. He often has to remind himself that studying hard is investing in his future.

Lena, 16, a student of accountancy in Kaluga, assures her foster mother she is fine. 'I'm strong, I'll manage!' is the weekly refrain over the telephone. She has made plenty of new friends, dyed her hair red, and comes home for holidays to see her friends. She has found herself a summer job working with accounts which will supplement her living allowance. She's still getting good grades and, like all the Kitezh graduates now studying in Kaluga, is among the best at English in her group.

One foster son from Kitezh, Volodya, has had a difficult few months. He has been in touch with members of his

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Kitezh students, Lena, Valya and Natasha

natural family, coping with suicide and drunkenness, and is missing the comfort of his foster home. He is being trained in landscape gardening but has skipped classes and has yet to settle fully into city life. Nevertheless, the solid educational grounding that Kitezh provided has stood him in good stead. In his first year at college he came top in IT and English. A Kitezh teacher says, 'Perhaps the most important development over this period is that these students no longer have the 'orphan complex'. They have gone through difficult months, fallen ill from bad weather and changes in diet and their environment, but they are still there, and Kitezh is still here for them.'

Ironically, Valya Kanuchina, 19, studying in the infamously tough city of Moscow, has had the fewest difficulties settling and adapting. She has just completed her first year at Moscow University for the Humanities. Cheerful and without arrogance, she tells us that she has excelled this academic year, and has still found time to take up a new hobby: juggling and fire-throwing. She has a wide circle of friends and visits Kitezh regularly.

Valya is looking forward to Vasily Burdin, 17, coming to join her in the Kitezh flat in Moscow. He is enrolled at the Academy of Economics and Law, and is another of life's optimists. He spent a week in March working at Baker Botts' Moscow office and found the experience extremely valuable. He explained, mostly in English, 'I understood that if I study well I can get a good job



Vasily, who begins his studies in Moscow in September.

like this one at Baker Botts. ... I liked it that they treated me like an adult, and because of that I behaved in a more adult way ... I can't wait to go to Moscow and study. ... I am not scared because I know there are people who will support me in Kitezh and I will try to use the knowledge I've acquired in Kitezh to help me settle into life in Moscow and make a success of it.'

Steve Wardlaw, CEO of Baker Botts, was impressed by Vasily's enthusiasm and commented, 'You and the Kitezh team should be very proud. Vasily was an absolute delight, and did his work very well. We would not have invited him back otherwise. He is very strong on interpersonal skills, and had confidence without being cocky. People very much enjoyed working with him. He helped on two deals, one of which is worth a little under \$8bn. I thought that if and when it ever closes, we would send him a thank you note – he seemed very chuffed to be working on something that size!' Vasily will benefit from the BEARR Trust/Baker Botts support in 2007-2008 when he starts university in September 2007. Vasily has a further month's work experience at Baker Botts' office this summer.

Perhaps when evaluating how these young people are adapting to independent life and further study, we should consider the fate that awaits most graduates of government institutions: crime, homelessness, suicide. Kitezh's young graduates, like any other teenagers, are both succeeding and struggling at the same time. Unlike most Russian orphans, however, just as long as they keep their eyes on the goal, their future can be extremely bright.

Ecologia Youth Trust has supported the growth and development of Kitezh Children's Community since it began in 1992.

CONTACT DETAILS

Liza Hollingshead
Ecologia Youth Trust
The Park, Forres, Moray IV36 3TD
Scotland

Email: info@ecologia.org.uk
www.ecologia.org.uk

Read, overleaf, about the other two projects supported by the 2007 Small Grants Scheme.

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Small Grants Scheme 2007 [continued]

Campaigning for NGOs

The homeless charity, Nochlezhka in St Petersburg, applied for a grant for a project to strengthen cooperation among Russian NGOs and state-sponsored organisations working with homeless people, and provide them with knowledge and skills in campaigning and supervision of their work.

The project comprises:

- A master-class on public relations and organisation of campaigns, and three follow-up meetings for representatives of NGOs and state-sponsored institutions working with



homeless people in St Petersburg and North-West and Central Russia. This course will equip participants with the skills required to start, manage, and complete campaigns effectively.

- Three follow up one-day meetings with local and regional members of the network.

The project will last four months and is being carried out in cooperation with the UK housing and homeless charity Shelter.

Homeless Football League

The NGO New Social Solutions (NSS) in St Petersburg has for several years been running a project aimed at the social rehabilitation and integration of homeless people into society through football.

The main aims of the project are:

- To establish, through football, conditions for improving the quality of life of homeless people, strengthening their motivation for returning back into society, and widening their social contact



- The breakdown of stereotypes and social stigmas about homeless people and the negative image of homelessness, through information campaigns during the football tournaments.

In order to move to the next stage of the project, NSS applied for a grant under the Small Grants Scheme to publish a 48-page information booklet, to be distributed exclusively through organisations for the socially excluded, to help promote a homeless football league throughout Russia. The booklet is due for publication in autumn 2007.

A fuller report on these two projects will appear on the BEARR website at www.bearr.org when they are completed, and in the next issue of this Newsletter.

Conflict resolution in the North Caucasus [continued from page 3]

Little Star activities are aimed at improving the physical, intellectual, creative and emotional spheres of the children's and teenagers' lives, encouraging their personal development and often allowing educational capacity to improve. The activities help to increase confidence and self-esteem, as well as the young people's ability to relax and simply enjoy themselves. Such positive outcomes influence their peers and families, and contribute to a general recovery of their society's psychosocial health.

CONTACT DETAILS

Chris Hunter
Peacebuilding UK
Tel/fax: 01288-359564
Email: info@peacebuildinguk.org
Website: www.peacebuildinguk.org

The NGO sector in Georgia – challenges and perspectives

Since Georgia's independence in 1992, the development of civil society, particularly the NGO sector, has undergone various challenges. In spite of that, the sector has survived in Georgia and become one of the most advanced and active in the post-Soviet space. Its peak of organisational maturity and financial stability came in 2003, when it played a crucial role in the democratic Rose Revolution which ousted an inefficient government of old-timers and propelled to power a younger generation of pro-western politicians led by Mikhail Saakashvili. It is symptomatic that many prominent NGO activists filled high-ranking positions in Saakashvili's administration and still play a leading role in the parliament dominated by his United National Movement.

However, according to some analysts, many well-known Georgian NGOs have, since the Rose Revolution, become too close to the authorities and this has temporarily weakened the NGO sector.

The relationship between the Georgian government and civil society is occasionally contentious and is marred by limited cooperation. While NGO experts provide technical support, they have little influence over government policy. Why is this? First, government decisions are made by only a few officials, with little public participation and strategic planning. Second, NGOs still need to improve their ability to plan and work together in the constantly changing political environment. This includes balancing and managing better their sometimes conflicting roles as community watchdogs, policy advocates, and government partners.

However, there are a few examples of successful cooperation between NGOs and the government in the field

of health care. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare include NGO expertise in their policy discussions. For example, the NGO 'Empathia' (www.empathy.ge) helped the Ministry to draft a policy paper on medical services in prisons in accordance with international standards, and to introduce modern methods of medical diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of victims of torture in prisons.

On the other hand, the Ministry cooperates only with 'friendly NGOs', while keeping those wishing to monitor the Ministry well away from the ongoing health care reforms, including budget spending and the auctioning of old hospital facilities and building new ones in their place. It should be noted that there are very few NGOs focused on health care in Georgia and those involved have varying levels of expertise, resources and capacity.

The problem of cooperation between government and NGOs, long under discussion since the Rose Revolution, needs to be addressed, and health care, along with the judiciary, is one of the critical aspects. According to the Civicus report, *Civil Society Index 2003-2005*, published in June 2006, 'civil society enjoys little autonomy from the state and civil society's impact on policy remains limited.' Georgia is listed as 'marked by high levels of interpersonal mistrust, which can easily hamper civic engagement and collective activism.'

The debates about 'state accountability' and 'corporate accountability' are already quite well known. Discussions about 'NGO accountability' are more recent. As the fastest growing segment of civil society, NGOs are frequently under

Zaal Anjaparidze
Coordinator for Civil Society Programs
Eurasia Foundation Georgia Office



fire for being 'unaccountable'. Surveys conducted by the USAID-funded Citizen Advocate Program in 2002 and 2005 revealed that the wider public continues to be unclear about the role and activities of NGOs because many NGOs are somewhat isolated from the target groups they are supposed to represent. The Civil Society Institute found that NGOs often fail to promote their positive values (e.g. tolerance, nonviolence) in society at large.

Before the 2003 Rose Revolution, the legal environment in which Georgian NGOs were operating was vague, but did not much hinder development of the third sector, because the government rarely resorted to the use of the vague legal provisions to restrict or tame NGOs.

FOCUS ON NGOs: GEORGIA



Improving the ambiguous legal framework for NGOs has long been on the agenda, and reforms since the Rose Revolution have led to improvements in the legal environment, which is now fairly supportive and permits NGOs to operate freely. The laws with the greatest impact on civil society are the Civil Code, the Law on Grants, the Tax Code and the General Administrative Code. The Freedom of Information Act is especially important for monitoring and watchdog groups. The Civil Code allows for an organisation to exist as a union or a foundation. Since 2005, the Ministry of Justice oversees the registration process; the only problem has been the registration of local branches of NGOs located in urban areas, and this has been attributed to the inexperience of the Ministry's staff in the regions. Generally, the law does not interfere with an organisation's activities, and only a court can suspend or ban NGO activities. When the laws were adopted, many feared that the regulations were too vague and would allow government officials to take legal action against NGOs. To date, however, no court has terminated an NGO's activities.

The new Tax Code, adopted in January 2005, preserves the existing benefits and exemptions for NGOs and extends them. It clearly defines the term 'charitable organisation' and allows corporations to deduct up to eight per cent of their profits for donations to support charitable activities, thanks to lobbying by the

Civil Society Institute and other organisations. The changes provide incentives for NGOs to re-register as charitable organisations, to take advantage of the new tax benefits. The Tax Code also creates a new mechanism for exempting NGOs from VAT, though administration continues to be problematic. Government officials must make a greater effort to fine-tune the implementation procedures for approving VAT exemptions and customs duties for international support of humanitarian activities.

In 2005, amendments to the Law on Grants and the Tax Code, legalized lending by microfinance institutions to help reduce poverty in Georgia.

Despite such reforms, NGO representatives continue to express concern. While NGOs generally have not experienced any interference from the government, watchdog and monitoring groups do have difficulties obtaining public information from some state agencies, particularly law-enforcement agencies, where, ironically, many civic activists moved after the Rose Revolution.

The law permits organisations to generate income by engaging in economic activities as well as by competing for government contracts. Recently, for example, a coalition of regional organisations won a contract worth \$145,000 from the Georgian Social Investment Fund, which supports institutional capacity building for local governance and community development. The NGO community must now start lobbying for a new Law on State Grants that would improve the state system for issuing grants and offer procurement opportunities in social services.

The photos accompanying this article show young people at the Georgian Foundation for Prosthetic and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation

A more detailed version of the article can be found on the BEARR website at www.bearr.org/en/information/June_07/Georgia/NGOs

Conclusions

- NGOs in Georgia retained their institutional capabilities, and improved their financial and logistical capacity between 2002 and 2005.
- The gap between Tbilisi-based and regional NGOs remains problematic, but is slightly less acute. This could be a result of better cooperation between these two groups.
- A fall in the number of field offices may be an indicator that more Tbilisi-based NGOs prefer to work with local partners, rather than to open their own offices.
- Much work needs to be done to improve NGOs' operational and management processes, especially in finance and human resources.
- Without such changes, NGOs' efficiency and outreach will continue to suffer.
- There has been a welcome 'spillover of capacity' to governmental agencies.
- However, NGOs need to establish better training and recruitment practices to avoid drastic and lasting loss of professional capacity.
- It seems that in the new political environment, NGOs find it more difficult to attract the attention of government and media to their causes.
- Public relations and advocacy skills must improve if NGOs want to retain their role in shaping and affecting policies. NGOs might consider pooling these capacities.

CONTACT DETAILS

Zaal Anjaparidze
Eurasia Foundation Georgia Office
zaal@eurasia.org.ge

Faith, Hope and Love in Odessa for the victims of trafficking

by *Olga Kostyuk, Deputy Director,
Faith, Hope, Love*

In 1996, in the city of Odessa in Ukraine, a group of experts and volunteers set up the NGO, 'Faith, Hope, Love'. Its work was focused on preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, preventing trafficking in human beings, providing assistance to victims of trafficking, preventing domestic violence, supporting the rights and freedoms of socially deprived people, and providing information on a healthy lifestyle and on sexual health.

Since 1998, with the help of the NGO for women's rights 'La Strada', we have been operating a hotline providing support for the prevention of trafficking. Every month our staff deal with 80 to 160 phone calls.

In 2005–06 we delivered lectures to students in the older classes at schools and higher and technical education establishments in ten districts in Odessa Region. We also distributed nine types of information material. In each of these districts, at least 1000 young people have received our preventative advice. Similar work is conducted regularly in schools and higher education establishments in Odessa city. We also organise training courses for representatives of central and local government authorities and partner organisations in Odessa Region and other CIS countries.

Photo: © Public Movement
'Faith, Hope, Love'



Faith, Hope, Love's hairdressing salon trains women for a new profession

We have established close cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Turkey. There a hotline '157' has been set up for women who find themselves in a threatening situation, and our NGO has worked to spread knowledge about this service. For instance, the ticket agencies give out the hotline number to people boarding the regular ferries to Turkey from Odessa.

Since July 2001 our organisation has established a reintegration centre called 'Asol' for women who have been victims of trafficking. There, up to six women at any one time receive accommodation, good food, medical check-ups and treatment, psychological help, education and vocational training and legal advice, and can be accompanied when they go to the police or court to give evidence in criminal cases. They are also given tickets to return to their homes.

In 2005, with financial support from the IOM and 'Memphisfilm', we set up a youth social centre. Its activities include running training workshops in sewing and hairdressing, at which young women can obtain skills under the guidance of experienced professionals.

In the period from August 2003 to June 2007, 610 Ukrainian and CIS citizens who had been deported via Ukraine were identified and helped. We identify such victims in Odessa port, at the airport and border control posts, and via the hotline and the law enforcement agencies. Our organisation has acquired unique experience of working to identify victims of trafficking as they cross the border into Ukraine. Odessa port receives ferries from Turkey carrying deported passengers twice a week. To identify victims, we conduct a personal interview with each deportee, in a room in the port building provided for that purpose. We have provided training in Odessa port for staff of the police, border guards and other law enforcement agencies in Odessa Region on the prevention of trafficking and cooperation with NGOs.

We have also set up a transit centre, again with the help of the IOM. It has now been operating for three years. Victims stay at the centre from one to ten days, depending on their state of health and their ability to return to their homes. For Moldovan victims, including those from Transnistria, the IOM in Moldova provides transport home, while citizens of other CIS countries are assisted by the IOM office in Ukraine. The NGO staff check up annually on previous victims of trafficking who have been helped by the centre and provide further help if it is needed.

In 2006 we published a book, *Interview with Hope*, with the stories of victims in Russian and English.

We cooperate with the law enforcement agencies, border guards and customs services. Staff of the centre work closely with the regional administration, the Directorate for Countering Trafficking of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in Odessa Region, the border guards, and international and Ukrainian partner organisations.

CONTACT DETAILS

'Faith, Hope, Love'
Odessa, Ukraine, 65011,
st. Uspenskaya, 53
tel: +38 (048) 7772517
fax: +38 (0482) 633339
email: semikop@te.net.ua
web: www.vnl.org.ua

NGOs in Turkmenistan

*by Ceri Utting
BEARR volunteer*

Turkmenistan, situated in Central Asia, is in desperate need of a thriving NGO sector. However, the future looks bleak in this respect. Although Turkmenistan has the potential to become a wealthy nation (it has the world's fourth largest natural gas reserves and an abundance of oil), the authoritarian and corrupt rule of ex-President Saparmurat Niyazov saw little of that wealth filter down to the people. Turkmenistan, a republic of the Soviet Union from 1924 until 1991, was extremely reluctant to relinquish her ties with Russia and was one of the last to declare independence. This delay, combined with Niyazov's rule, has meant that an NGO sector has completely failed to flourish and is by far the weakest in the former Soviet countries. Additionally, it appears that Niyazov regarded NGOs as a threat. He put through many harsh policies impeding freedom of speech and education. Such tight control over the public has had severe consequences for Turkmenistan.

The main restriction facing the citizens of Turkmenistan in establishing an NGO is the registration process. In 2001 only one organisation was granted registration. In 2006, no organisations were given approval by the Ministry of Justice, although some were given registration as 'public commercial organisations'. In total there are 89 registered NGOs in Turkmenistan including the Youth Organisation and the Union of Women. However, only ten of these are independent, e.g. the refugee group Keik Okara. It appears that the Turkmenistan government is using its laws to deny NGO registration in order to control the NGO sector. Even groups with absolutely no political agenda are being refused registration e.g. the National Artisans Association, which promotes a traditional Turkmen culture that ironically Niyazov himself strongly advocated.

Due to the restrictive nature of the registration process many groups opt to work illegally. This, however, is very risky. The Criminal Code of Turkmenistan states that members of any group operating illegally can face a fine of 10-30 months' wages, hard labour for one year, or a possible 6-month prison sentence. With such harsh penalties it is a wonder that groups dare function illegally. Also, taking such risks may have little practical benefit since illegal groups cannot advertise and any work they do has to be done underground, often making it ineffective. Although the Constitution declares Turkmenistan a secular democracy and a presidential republic, and Article 28 of the May 1992 Constitution even states that citizens have the right to establish public associations, the restrictions are so tight that this provision is basically redundant.

A further problem facing the already struggling NGO sector is the financial regulations devised by the government. Finances, generally speaking, are always an issue, but even more so in Turkmenistan. The registration fees are expensive: to register a local public association costs \$300; a national public association costs \$500; and an international public association costs \$2000. In 2004, 60 per cent of the population was estimated to be unemployed and 58 per cent thought to be living below the poverty line. It is hard to envisage how NGOs could manage the registration fees.

The NGOs that do manage to register get no financial assistance from the government. They are expected to rely on international donors, yet this creates another obstacle. Turkmenistan is relatively closed off from the West as Niyazov preferred a 'secretive' state. So, whilst international funding is permitted, it is not especially forthcoming due to the shroud of secrecy surrounding Turkmenistan.

It is hard to draw any positives from this situation. Although 89 NGOs exist, they are likely to be subject to further registration issues, possible liquidation and complete lack of funds. There are some loopholes, for instance, unsuccessful organisations joining forces with registered ones, but again this is risky. The positives that are apparent are, however, a step in the right direction: children's organisations are exempt from tax; organisations can appeal in court if they are denied registration; and international cooperation is allowed. However, one can only surmise that the court of appeal is a slow and arduous process that yields few results.

The death of President Niyazov in December 2006 might have given some hope for change, but there is little sign of this so far. His successor, Gurbanghly Berdimuhammedov, seems to advocate similar policies. The fact that President Berdimuhammedov won the election with 99 per cent of the vote would seem to indicate the continuation of corruption and an authoritarian state. Although time is yet to tell, the future does not look promising.

To conclude, the NGO sector, if it can even be called that, is in desperate need of help. The only way organisations can establish themselves is through a drastic change in the registration laws. Without this, little will be achieved. One can only hope that President Berdimuhammedov will prove his critics wrong, amend the laws and allow the people of Turkmenistan to improve their society.

CONTACT DETAILS

Ceri Utting
cez201@hotmail.com

Broadcasting during the Cold War and after: *was it – and is it – worth it?*

by *Elisabeth Robson, consultant, previously Head of the BBC Russian Service*

The role of international broadcasting in transmitting new ideas and changing attitudes in closed societies is by its nature difficult to assess and nearly impossible to quantify. Nevertheless, many Russians have testified to the impact of ideas and information heard on foreign radio. Some argue that without this input, reform would have been even harder than it has proved to be.

Among many personal experiences of the power of broadcasting, two stand out. The first was in Leningrad during the invasion of Czechoslovakia, August 1968. Intense jamming, which is as expensive as broadcasting real programmes, prevented friends from listening to the BBC Russian Service – and other international broadcasters, Radio Liberty and the Voice of America – and, as the crisis deepened and the tanks rolled in, I listened to crackly broadcasts in English and translated the latest developments. The Soviet Union had deliberately cut itself off from the rest of the world and was peddling its citizens a version of events unrecognisable outside. Its citizens wanted much more.

Listening continued in secret, at the dacha where there was less jamming, or in cities when freak conditions allowed. Nothing was said openly, except when dissidents were put on trial and part of the charge sheet included listening to foreign radio stations, or when the Soviet press decided it was time to remind people of the enemy in the ether, spreading lies to which no good citizen would listen or give any credence.

In all the Brezhnev and post-Brezhnev years in the USSR I would meet people everywhere who either admitted freely that they listened regularly or instantly recognised the names of foreign stations. The veteran BBC commentator Anatoly Maksimovich Goldberg was a household name to a whole generation of Soviet citizens. The ‘enemy voices’, as the Soviet press dubbed the stations, were more like friends to many sections of society, offering a different view of the



‘Short wave ... and an idle tongue’

world, from politics to pop music, philosophy and literature to news of science and technology.

Listeners came from all walks of life and all parts of the Soviet Union through the miracle of short wave broadcasting – which the USSR itself used to reach its distant regions with central broadcasting. They were, as one would expect, from the more educated sections of society, but a much wider group than the top intelligentsia of the principal cities. Provincial school teachers, the so-called ‘technical intelligentsia’, sailors and radio buffs were among regular listeners who contrived to write to the BBC in London.

My second example is from August 1991: Gorbachev is a prisoner at his Foros dacha in the Crimea, listening to foreign radio stations. The world holds its breath to see whether the plotters can establish their hold and reverse the reforms of the glasnost period. A huge crowd gathers at the White House where Russian President Yeltsin leaps on a tank to address it and prominent Russians speak from the balcony in support. Mstislav Rostropovich flies in to Moscow and goes straight to the White House. Foreign journalists do likewise. State television broadcasts Swan Lake with brief statements from a stone-faced announcer and the tanks start to roll into the city centre. Walking through the crowds on the two days before the coup attempt began to unravel, all around me were people with transistor radios clamped to their ears. From time to time the call signs of the BBC and Radio Liberty or the Voice of America could be heard, and the continuous broadcasting of news helped to stiffen people’s resolve.

In Yeltsin’s Russia, regular research into listeners and their habits became possible. While questions remain about its reliability – a long tradition of discretion about listening is hard to break – it showed a huge peak in listening in 1991, 1992 and 1993, after which it began to fall off as Russian

BEARR ANNUAL LECTURE

stations proliferated and listening moved onto the Western FM band and medium wave.

Media law was a mess, and constantly amended, leading to the current system of licensing without which no one may broadcast. The BBC, along with other foreign broadcasters, made deals with Russian stations to take its material and in this way gain access to the prized FM frequencies. An early bid for a medium wave frequency in three cities was successful; access to FM in Moscow has proved well-nigh impossible although a deal is currently under negotiation.

The relationships with Russian stations have gradually been destroyed, by the simple expedient of withdrawing licences and threatening stations with being shut down if they continue to broadcast the BBC. In this way, by stealth, the Russian authorities have reduced the BBC's broadcasting to a poor medium wave frequency in Moscow, inaudible to half the city, better frequencies in St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg, and nothing else. Some short wave continues over European Russia. Collapsing figures for listening are the inevitable consequence. At the same time the Kremlin has tightened its grip on the main television and radio channels, so there is no outlet for alternative voices.

Many argue that this is of no importance as we now have the Internet and the BBC Russian Service website (bbcussian.com) is highly regarded. People can listen to the programmes over the Internet too, if they have a good enough connection.

Internet use is rising all the time in Russia, and the principal cities have many Internet cafes for those with

a poor telephone line. The provinces are another matter, however, and longer term we need only look at China and how it controls access to the Internet to see that this situation will not allow unlimited access to the outside world forever.

Whether this matters depends on how we rate Russia as a world power in the future. We may believe that at present Russia is huffing and puffing from weakness, but more consistent government and proper reform of the economy could change that dramatically while continuing the dangerous policy of appealing to a primitive nationalism.

Meanwhile the emphasis on the Middle East crisis means that the BBC, in common with other foreign broadcasters, is shifting efforts away from broadcasting to Russia. Should a major international crisis involve Russia, it will be extremely hard to reach the audiences who need to know what the West is doing without the filter of heavily censored and biased media.

If the past can teach us anything, it is that we should not underestimate the power of broadcasting. People want to know and we should be providing that knowledge and developing whatever technology looks promising.

CONTACT DETAILS

Elisabeth Robson
Tel/fax 01273 556156
Elisabeth.robson@eastwestinsight.com

The BEARR Trust Annual Lecture 2007: *'Russia: towards a new isolationism?'*

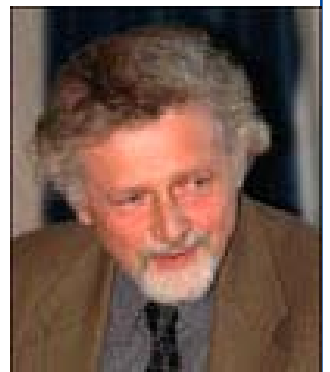
by Dr Alex Pravda, St Antony's College, Oxford

The BEARR Trust Annual Lecture will be held at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), One Exchange Square, London EC2A 2JN on **19 September 2007** at 6pm.

Dr Pravda is one of the UK's pre-eminent experts on Russian foreign policy in the period after the Cold War, and a lively speaker. He is currently a Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, and previously worked at Chatham House, at universities in the UK and US, and as adviser to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee.

The President of the EBRD, Jean Lemierre, will welcome the guests. The lecture will be followed by a reception, which will allow for further discussion and networking with others with an interest in the field.

If you would like to attend, please email ukadmin@bearr.org, or go to www.bearr.org/en/event/lecture_2007/Pravda



Marking 15 years of The BEARR Trust

Snapshots from the early BEARR

'I'm glad someone is looking after the bears in Russia.' Only once, as far as I'm aware, did we ever get a letter saying this after the tricky choice of the organisation's name over 15 years ago.

BEARR (originally British Emergency Aid to Russia and the Republics) was set up in Moscow in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union by a group of energetic British women who saw an immediate need to relieve the distress of the time.

The need for a base in the UK quickly became apparent, and De Beers kindly sponsored a London office. I joined some of the Trustees, notably Terri Tollemache and Ellen Dahrendorf in the UK, and Jill Braithwaite still in Moscow, to organise the formal launch of The BEARR Trust and its early activities. It was a steep learning curve for us all in a fast-changing world, with no example to follow. But it was fun and those were heady days when vision, energy and enthusiasm had to suffice before any official funding schemes were up and running.

In those days the former Soviet Union was in the news every day, and the lack of any voluntary sector to assist with onward aid distribution and seek out those most in need was keenly felt. When BEARR organised lorry loads of aid it was all distributed via state institutions in the Urals, from hospitals to chicken farms. I was one of the volunteers who took the first lorry from London to Chelyabinsk – eight days 'on the road', with accommodation hard to find; a friend of mine living on the Volga has only just forgiven me for turning up unexpectedly with two drivers and our escort of three military police – all needing a place to sleep!

It is 15 years since we opened BEARR's Moscow office and started the longer-term work of grass-roots organisational development and liaison with UK charities keen to assist in the development of a voluntary sector – work which still forms the core of BEARR's activities. Just one example. Ruth Steele and I helped organise the first Women's Forum in Dubno, and shared the excitement and amazement of the 600-plus women who came from across the country to discuss a variety of women's issues. There were many more such projects, showing that not much encouragement was needed to secure community participation. A whole raft of groups and initiatives sprang up from that weekend alone.

It is good to know that even now many of the booklets we translated from the National Asthma Campaign's literature collection are still being used across the country, that the hospice handbooks have seen many reincarnations, and that our social work seminars did much to broaden the early understanding of the role of a social worker. These

By Megan Bick, new BEARR Trustee and co-organiser of the first BEARR office in the UK



The first BEARR Newsletters, 1993-94

seminars were one of our major contributions to helping East European Partnership (part of VSO) to establish their first activities in Russia.

The voluntary sector in Russia and its links with the UK have certainly had their ups and downs, but one thing that has remained constant is the wealth of experience and fascinating people who come to the annual BEARR Conference. I look forward to seeing many of you there this year, both to reminisce and to look forward.

CONTACT DETAILS

Megan Bick
bickmegan@yahoo.com

Jobs for disabled people in Moscow

A US firm in Moscow would like to employ disabled Russian staff in jobs for which they are suited, e.g. receptionist, driver, translator, secretary, interpreter. They have been unable to find such staff. Does anyone know of any agency looking for jobs for the disabled? If so, please contact info@bearth.org.

The BEARR Trust Annual Conference 2007

‘The Demographic Challenge in Russia and Eurasia: what role for civil society?’

‘What is most important for our country? ... What I want to talk about is love, women, children. I want to talk about the family, about the most acute problem facing our country today – the demographic problem. ... You know that our country’s population is declining by an average of almost 700,000 people a year. We have raised this issue on many occasions but have for the most part done very little to address it. Resolving this problem requires us to take the following steps. First, we need to lower the death rate. Second, we need an effective migration policy. And third, we need to increase the birth rate.’

– President Putin

These issues will be the focus for discussion at this year’s Annual Conference, to be held on 23 November 2007 at The Charity Centre, Euston.

The conference will cover

- analysis of the problem and the policy response so far
- women, children and families
- the trouble with men: alcohol, drugs, HIV
- migration and refugees.

If you wish to feed in ideas for the conference, or to suggest possible speakers or participants, please contact ukadmin@barr.org.

Further details of the programme as it firms up, and in due course a booking form, will appear under BEARR Events on the website at www.barr.org



Sponsored cycle ride

Francis Callaway, recently elected as a BEARR Trustee, is going on a sponsored cycle ride to Vietnam in October, and is kindly donating the proceeds to BEARR.

Francis has a long history of fund-raising for good causes, especially related to marginalised groups and disadvantaged children. Most recently she has been active in Kazakhstan, where she helped to set up the NGO Nabat, the work of which was described at last year’s BEARR Conference. (See Newsletter No 48).

Francis’s Vietnam cycle ride will fulfil an old dream of hers and benefit BEARR as well.

The ride involves cycling more than 700km in eight days. Francis has spent many months training hard, on the treadmill, cross trainer and bicycle in the gym, and then around the Kent countryside. Those who know her have no doubt she will complete her mammoth task successfully.

To support Francis – and BEARR – please go to <http://www.justgiving.com/almaty> where you can donate on-line. Or send your cheque, made out to The BEARR Trust, to: The BEARR Trust (Callaway), 2nd floor, River House, 143-145 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3AB.

BEARR welcomes new trustees

The BEARR Trust is delighted to have elected three new Trustees. Here we introduce them.

Megan Bick



Megan in a forest near Smolensk

After studying Russian at school and university, Megan was so enthused by the language, history and culture that she searched for opportunities to work and live in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. These came first through Keston College and then as a lecturer with the British Council, giving her ringside seats for perestroika. Wanting to get more closely involved with the social changes, she then helped start the hospice movement in Russia, did an MA in Soviet Studies at SSEES, and while doing that helped the initial trustees set up the BEARR Trust. She has been working on projects in the region ever since.

(See Megan's article on the early days of BEARR on p. 13)

Francis Callaway

Whilst living in Kazakhstan from 1997 to 2005 Francis became involved with charitable organisations and worked closely with teenagers leaving orphanages. Wanting to get more closely involved with the social changes, she then helped start the vocational training programme in Almaty for these teenagers. In order to do this she enjoyed learning the Russian language. Since her return to the UK she has continued her studies of Russian and has tried to maintain her involvement with these teenagers by working with The BEARR Trust.

(See Francis's sponsored cycle ride on p. 14)



Francis at Blind School No 4 in Almaty, with the Director and his wife

Sarah Philps MBE



Sarah in a Moscow orphanage

Sarah started learning Russian in Mogilev, Belorussian SSR, where she attended School No 57 for two years. After graduating from SSEES in 1978, she spent two years as an au pair and translator in Moscow. Following a PGCE in languages, she taught Russian at Christ's Hospital boys' school. In 1994 she returned to Moscow to study the Russian state care system, particularly regarding children with disabilities. In 1995 Sarah co-founded Action for Russia's Children (ARC), a UK charity supporting local Russian alternatives to institutional care. She currently works as a consultant for Downside Up, a UK charity which runs an early intervention centre in Moscow for children with Down's Syndrome.

Short-term contracts with international organisations

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) maintains a database of UK experts willing to be seconded to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other international organisations to work on projects in various countries. When an organisation asks for a secondees to do a job the UK wishes to support, the FCO will nominate the strongest candidate from its database. A successful UK candidate will be offered a six-month contract by the FCO with

the possibility of extension. They then work for the international organisation.

The FCO has around 250 secondees abroad at any one time with the OSCE, UN, EU or bilaterally with individual governments, working in areas such as:

- prevention of people-trafficking
- democratisation and elections
- gender equality and minority rights
- human rights
- rehabilitation in post-conflict situations
- tolerance and non-discrimination.

Requirements: good qualifications and a strong CV. Speakers of Russian and languages of the Caucasus and Central Asia are in particular demand. For some examples of secondees' work see www.fcocasestudies.fco.gov.uk.

Those interested should send their CV to OSCESecondments@fco.gov.uk.

The BEARR Trust website

www.bearr.org

Are you making full use of the BEARR website? Have you explored all its features?

For the **latest news**:

- Bulletin of NGO news from Moscow, updated weekly
- Googlenews from Russia and Eurasia, updated daily
- BBC Russian Service news, updated hourly

Information on specialist topics – just enter your interest in Search:

- Articles on health, welfare and civil society from a variety of sources
- Articles on conditions for NGOs in various countries

- Information on the activities of various NGOs
- Database of NGOs
- Archive of BEARR Newsletters

BEARR events – find the latest situation on lectures, conferences and other events, and reports of previous events.

Noticeboard forum, where you can advertise your job vacancy, seek help or discuss relevant topics.

The website is in its early stages, and will be as good as its users and contributors make it. Register as a Member today (it's free!) and you can contribute directly. Or send any contributions to ukadmin@bearr.org.

The BEARR Trust endeavours to include as wide a debate and as broad a range of opinions as possible in the Newsletter to capture the diversity of NGO work in the UK, Russia and Eurasia. However, The BEARR Trust cannot be held responsible for the views expressed by authors in their articles.

About The BEARR Trust

Patrons: The Duchess of Abercorn, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Elena Bashkirova Barenboim, Lady Fall, Myra Green OBE, Professor Geoffrey Hosking, Lady Hurd, HE Sir Roderic Lyne KBE CMG, Sir Jonathan Miller CBE, Anthony Oppenheimer, Rair Simonyan, Sir Andrew Wood GCMG

The BEARR Trust is a British registered charity. It was formed in 1991 to act as a bridge between the welfare and health sectors of Britain and the former Soviet republics. Its mission is:

- to promote and support cooperation between the third sector in the United Kingdom and appropriate partners in Russia and Eurasia, especially in health and social welfare, with a view to strengthening civil society.

The Trust will do this by:

- supporting organisations committed to reform in the health and social sectors
- facilitating networking and exchange of information
- encouraging sharing of experience and learning
- helping organisations working in the region to identify potential partners
- providing seed funding to assist selected organisations to launch or extend partnerships
- lobbying with and on behalf of organisations that share our objectives.

Trustees: Michael McCulloch (Chairman), Megan Bick, Francis Callaway, Stephen Dalziel, Yuri Goligorsky, Daryl Hardman, Marcia Levy, Ann Lewis CMG, Anne Lindley, Sarah Philips MBE, Nicola Ramsden

Staff: Information Officer: Renate Wright
Web manager, Moscow: Alexander Pokhilko

Volunteers: Philip Michaelson, Martin Edwards, Ceri Utting

Newsletter: Editor: Ann Lewis; layout: Leila Carlyle

Registered charity no: 1011086

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Become a Friend of BEARR and receive the Newsletter as well as details of our events throughout the year.

Please return the form with your cheque to The BEARR Trust office at the address below.

- I wish to become a Friend of The BEARR Trust. Minimum gift £30 per year.
- I wish to renew my Friend's subscription and enclose a cheque for £30.
- I wish to make a donation and enclose a cheque for £.....(payable to The BEARR Trust).
- I wish to make a regular donation by banker's order.

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