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COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

RUSSIA

19 JANUARY 2007

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1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by Research, Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 19 January 2007.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- iii For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Russia is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

Home Office
Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
Croydon CR9 3RR
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Email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information was established under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the Home Office's country of origin information material. The Advisory Panel welcomes all feedback on the Home Office's country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at www.apci.org.uk.

It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any Home Office material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly

reviews the content of selected Home Office COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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2. Background Information about Russia

Full Country Name: Russian Federation.

Area: Total area 17,075,400 square kilometres.

Population: 143,400,000 (2005).

Capital City: Moscow.

People: Russians (80 per cent), Tatars, Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Chechens and Armenians, each of which accounted for at least 1 million residents (more than 100 nationalities in total).

Languages: Russian (official) approx. 100 other languages spoken.

Religion(s): Orthodox Christianity (official), Islam, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism and Jehovah's Witness.

Currency: 1 Rouble = 100 Kopeks

Major Political Parties: United Russia, Communist Party, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Motherland bloc of regional parties, the People's Party.

(Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (p19)

Head of State: President Vladimir Putin

Prime Minister/Premier: Mikhail Fradkov

Foreign Minister: Sergei Lavrov

(Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a]

Membership of International Groupings/Organisations: United Nations Security Council, United Nations Committee on Trade and Development, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, United Nations Security Council, Universal Postal Union, World Health Organization, and World Trade Organization (as an observer), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, as a dialogue partner), Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact, Commonwealth of Independent States, Council of Baltic States, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Group of 8 (G-8), International Atomic Energy Agency, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Labour Organization, International Maritime Organization, International Monetary Fund, International Organization for Migration (as an observer), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Paris Club, Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (24)

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GEOGRAPHY

Russia stretches from Eastern Europe across central Asia all the way to the Bering Sea, which separates Asia from North America (Alaska). It is the largest country in the world and encompasses 11 time zones. For its size Russia has a relatively small population. Large areas of the country e.g. Siberia are extremely sparsely populated. The republic of Chechnya is located in the North Caucasus Region (see tip of European Russia on first map). (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a] Chapter 3 of the Constitution provides more detailed information on the federal structure of the Russian Federation. It can be accessed via this link <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-04.htm>

MAPS



Map courtesy of CIA World Fact Book



Map courtesy of Institute for War and Peace Reporting



Map courtesy of Refugee International

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RECENT HISTORY

The Russian Federation came into being on 31 December 1991. Prior to this it was the largest component of the Soviet Union (USSR). Since his election as President in 2000 Vladimir Putin has come to dominate Russian politics personifying the desire for a strong national leader shared by many ordinary Russians. The pro-Putin party United Russia and its allies control two thirds of the votes in the Duma (Parliament) allowing them to change the Constitution. Putin's administration is authoritarian but popular due in part to high oil prices, censorship of the press and an uncompromising stance on Chechnya. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (FCO, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a]

RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The last Parliamentary elections were held on 7 December 2003 and resulted in a resounding victory for United Russia, which gained over three times as many votes as the second placed Communist Party. In 2006, United Russia held 309 seats; the Communist Party, 45 seats; the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, 35 seats; and the Motherland bloc of regional parties, 29 seats; the People's Party, 12 seats; Independents, 12 seats; two seats were vacant in the Duma. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (p19) The next Parliamentary elections are due in late 2007. (FCO, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a]

Vladimir Putin was re-elected President of Russia on 14 March 2004. The FCO country profile for Russia described his election as a "landslide" but also raised concerns about biased media coverage. The next Presidential elections are due in 2008. (FCO, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a] Vladimir

Putin is constitutently barred from running for a third term of office. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27 September 2006) [33j]

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ECONOMY

GDP: US\$ 766 billion (2005).

GDP per head: US\$ 5,369 (2005).

Annual Growth: 6.4% (2005):5.5% (Quarter 1 2006).

Inflation: 10.9% (2005).

Major Industries: Oil, gas, timber, metals, machinery and chemicals.

Major trading partners: Germany (9%), US (7.7%), Ukraine (4.9%) and Belarus (5.4%).

Exchange rate: Rb 26.8/US\$ (October 2006).

(FCO, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a]

The Russian economy relies heavily on the export of raw materials, particularly oil and gas. High oil prices have allowed the government to settle most of its outstanding foreign debt. Russia has not yet joined the WTO and much of the economy remains in state hands. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (FCO, Country Profile: Russian Federation, last updated on 16 October 2006) [4a] The state owned gas company Gazprom enjoys a virtual monopoly. (BBC, Country Profile: Russia, last updated on 8 October 2006) [7a]

Corruption is a serious problem and the informal sector of the economy has been estimated at between 25 and 40 per cent of GDP. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] (p8) Under the Presidency of Putin's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin a group of wealthy businessmen (Oligarchs) emerged. Since Putin's election in 2000 their power has diminished and some have fled the country or been imprisoned e.g. Mikhail Khodorkovsky. (BBC, Country Profile: Russia, last updated on 8 October 2006) [7a]

During the first half of the 1990's Russia suffered from persistent bouts of hyperinflation and general economic malaise. However, since 1998 inflation, though still high by western standards, has been brought under control and the government has been more successful in collecting taxes and regulating the financial sector. Russia's low birth rate may jeopardise long term economic growth. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

The FCO country profile for Russia stated, "While human rights and civic freedoms have improved dramatically since the collapse of the USSR, some concerns remain, which continue to attract public and parliamentary interest. These include human rights abuses in Chechnya and the North Caucasus, the development of civic society, the media freedom, xenophobic or racially motivated attacks and conditions in the armed forces." [4a] In their Annual Report on Human Rights 2006 the FCO stated, "The North Caucasus remains the region where human rights abuses give rise to the most serious concern. Notwithstanding a reduction in the number of reported human rights abuses, the situation in the region remains one of Europe's most serious human rights issues." [4b] (p86-87) The US State Department (USSD) Report on Human Rights 2005 also

raised concerns about the centralisation of power resulting in "... an erosion of the accountability of government leaders to the people." [2a] (p1)

In their Annual Report 2005 (covering events from January - December 2005) Amnesty International (AI) highlighted the following areas of concern:

- Conflict in the North Caucasus
- Violence against women
- Hostility towards human rights defenders
- Racism, xenophobia and intolerance
- Fair trial concerns
- Arbitrary detention, torture and conditions of detention
- Refoulement [11a]

Human Rights Watch (HRW) in their World Report 2007 stated:

"The murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaia profoundly shocked the human rights movement in Russia and internationally and symbolized the further deterioration of the human rights situation in Russia. Meanwhile, the Kremlin has tightened its grip on human rights organizations and other independent institutions. Grave human rights abuses persist in Chechnya, including torture, abductions, and forced disappearances, and the conflict threatens to spill over into other regions of the northern Caucasus." [5a]

Chechnya

In their Annual Report on Human Rights 2006 the FCO stated:

"The North Caucasus remains violent, unstable and vulnerable to human rights violations... Chechnya has shown some signs of increasing stability, there are still frequent reports of serious human rights violations there and the authorities appear to be doing little to tackle the problem... Torture, abductions, hostage-taking and clashes continue, though the number has fallen since last year. According to human rights groups, such activities are often carried out on behalf of the authorities by groups of armed men from several different federal and local agencies loyal to Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov." [4b] (p87-88)

HWR in their World Report 2007 stated:

"Despite claims of stability and reconstruction in Chechnya, the ongoing armed conflict continues to claim civilian lives. Russia's federal forces play less of a direct role in Chechnya; pro-Kremlin Chechen forces under the command of Chechnya's prime minister, Ramzan Kadyrov, known as the 'kadyrovtsy' now dominate law enforcement and security operations and commit grave human rights abuses. Although local human rights groups reported a slight decline in the number of abductions leading to forced disappearances in 2006, these disappearances remain a key feature of the conflict, with as many as 5,000 people "disappeared" since 1999 and at least 54 so far in 2006. Reports of torture, especially in unofficial detention centers run by the 'Kadyrovtsy' increased in 2006." [5a]

AI in their Annual Report 2005 accused both sides in Chechnya of committing "war crimes". [11a]

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SOCIAL ISSUES

Unemployment and living standards vary widely between regions. For example Moscow enjoys relatively high standards of living and low unemployment. Other regions however suffer from high unemployment and a lack of basic services. In Chechnya unemployment rates have been estimated at between 40 and 90 per cent of the working population. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a]

The Russian population is shrinking due to a combination of low birth rates and low life expectancy. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] The life expectancy is 61 for men and 73 for women. (BBC, Country Profile: Russia, last updated on 8 October 2006) [7a] Heavy drinking and environmental derogation have exacerbated this trend. Russia also has one of the highest rates of HIV infection outside of sub-Saharan Africa. (Library of Congress Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006) [1a] The government has displayed an ambiguous attitude towards a rise in xenophobia. (AI, Russian Federation: Violent racism out of control, 4 May 2006) [11i]

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3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[1a] Library of Congress, Country Profiles: Russia, updated 20 October 2006 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles.html [2a] USSD, Report on Human Rights Practices 2005: Russia, 8 March 2006 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61671.htm [2c] USSD, Background Note: Russia, last updated July 2006 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3183.htm [4a] FCO, Country Profile: Russian Federation (last updated on 16 October 2006) http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019744935436 [7a] BBC, Country Profile: Russia, last updated on 8 October 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1102275.stm [10a] CIA, The World Factbook, Russia, last updated 17 October 2006 https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/rs.html [10b] CIA, Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments, Russia, last updated 28 June 2006 https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/chiefs/chiefs147.html
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