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# UNFINISHED BUSINESS: 1991 AS THE END OF THE CPSU BUT NOT OF THE KGB

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In the late 1980s, under Gorbachev's glasnost, the emergence of relatively independent Soviet media outlets worried the Lubyanka, and the KGB Higher School started to monitor media coverage critical of KGB activities.<sup>1</sup> Yuri Shchekochikhin, a leading investigative journalist and USSR people's deputy, became a target of the KGB's watchful eye. A 1990 issue of the *KGB Sbornik*, the flagship journal issued within the KGB under the stamp of "top secret" in 1959-1991, contains a piece entitled "How Are the 'White Spots' Washed Off?: Rejoinder," in which a Chekist author, Major A. Ivanov, reviewed Shchekochikhin's article "Potomok" (Descendant)—his interview with David Chavchavadze, a former CIA colonel of Georgian and Russian descent, published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. Ivanov's text starts:

Many years ago, in the early years of Soviet power, the famous satirist Arkady Averchenko wrote the book *Twelve Knives in the Back of the Revolution*. The book then caught the eye of Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin], and he read it with interest, written as it was by the talented pen of a convinced counter-revolutionary. "Every class-conscious proletarian must definitely get acquainted with this book to know for sure to what baseness the bourgeoisie descends when they slander the country of

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<sup>1</sup> The KGB Higher School regularly issued the bulletin *Perestroika i obshchestvennoe mnenie* [Perestroika and Public Opinion] for internal use. This bulletin monitored the criticisms of the KGB expressed by *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Kuranty*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, and *Ekho Moskvy*. See 1990. "Pressa o KGB SSSR [Press about the USSR KGB]." *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146/147: 80–82.

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workers and peasants,” was Lenin’s verdict.

I recalled this episode when I read the article “Potomok” by the journalist Yuri Shchekochikhin, published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* No. 20. I remembered and thought: every employee of our service must definitely read, comprehend, and understand what political meaning the author and his interlocutor—a former Grand Duke and a former “Colonel of the CIA”—put into the intricate fabric of this skillfully written material.<sup>2</sup>

Shchekochikhin’s “Potomok” was sensational in 1990. It was perhaps the first uncensored interview with a former intelligence officer of the main adversary, the United States, to be printed in a Soviet publication. For Shchekochikhin himself, “such a meeting could not have been foreseen even in a dream.” Also unprecedented was Shchekochikhin’s allusion to the need to establish democratic oversight of the Soviet political police, taking the U.S. system as an example. Inspired by the conversation with Chavchavadze, who did not conceal that he had been a CIA officer and was now “a consultant of a big firm,” Shchekochikhin mentioned, “the parliamentary, public, and newspaper pressure under which the [American] secret services constantly find themselves is, in the end, a guarantee that taxpayers’ money, for example, will not go to a senseless intelligence hunt for Stalin’s daughter.”<sup>3</sup> According to the faithful Chekist Ivanov, however, the article was an attempt by the CIA officer, with the help of the Soviet journalist, to disinform gullible Soviet readers and discredit the KGB leadership while offering “not a single word on CIA covert operations.”<sup>4</sup>

### Civic Monitoring and Parliamentary Oversight

Security and intelligence agencies inherited from autocratic regimes continue to be a source of concern for emerging democracies. Unlike the military, which may support the end of the party dictatorship (“The army wants to serve not a party but the nation”), the secret police have a lot to lose from democratic transition.<sup>5</sup> The KGB, which had supported the superstructure named the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) for nearly seven decades, was “much more a self-regulating and self-preserving system than the ruling party,” according to Boris Pustintsev,

<sup>2</sup> A. Ivanov. 1990. “Chem smyvaiutsia ‘belye piatna’?: Replika [How Are ‘White Spots’ Washed Away? : Rejoinder].” *Sbornik KGB SSSR* 146/147: 75–77.

<sup>3</sup> Yurii Shchekochikhin. “Potomok” [Descendant]. *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. May 16, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Ivanov, “Chem smyvaiutsia ‘belye piatna’?,” 76.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Przeworski. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 74–75.

chairman of Grazhdanskii Kontrol, a St. Petersburg-based NGO.<sup>6</sup> During perestroika, the KGB embarked on its own self-perestroika to adapt its intelligence and counterintelligence tradecraft to emerging operational circumstances—economic liberalization, expanding democracy, and glasnost—and ensure its survival.<sup>7</sup> Chekists thus downplayed their past crimes and portrayed themselves as a new “reformed” KGB.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1990s, democratic control of the KGB and its successors became a daunting challenge for the new Russia. *Demokratizatsiya* provided a forum to discuss the country’s efforts to establish an effective oversight and civic monitoring mechanism for the former political police. In response to the request of both Soviet and Russian parliamentarians to learn about the U.S. experience of Congressional oversight, *Demokratizatsiya* co-founding editor J. Michael Waller helped facilitate the visit of a bipartisan Congressional delegation to Moscow in February 1992.<sup>9</sup> The following month, Shchekochikhin was the sole participant from Russia in the first meeting sponsored by *Demokratizatsiya* at American University in Washington, D.C., where he and Western scholars and practitioners—including former CIA director William Colby—discussed how to help Russian democrats place the post-Soviet security agencies under parliamentary oversight. The participants in the second meeting discussed the idea of launching the Coordinating Council in the US and the Consulting Center in Moscow, although Fredo Arias-King, the founder of *Demokratizatsiya*, foresaw that “elements within the former KGB” would seek to undermine their endeavors.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in 1993, Sergei Grigoryants, a Soviet dissident formerly arrested and jailed by the KGB for anti-Soviet propaganda, organized the international conference “Past, Present and Future of the KGB,” which was attended by civic activists, experts, foreign scholars, and former and active officers of the security organs. Democratic control of KGB successor organizations was at the top of the agenda for this conference.<sup>11</sup> Quickly

<sup>6</sup> Boris Pustintsev. 1996. “Russian Political Police: Immortal Traditions and Eternal Threats.” *Demokratizatsiya* 4: 4: 531–37.

<sup>7</sup> Sanshiro Hosaka. Forthcoming. “Perestroika of the KGB: Chekists Penetrate Politics.” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, At <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2022.2074810>, accessed December 26, 2022; Sanshiro Hosaka. Forthcoming. “Chekists Penetrate the Transition Economy: The KGB’s Self-Reforms during Perestroika.” *Problems of Post-Communism*, At <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2022.2077219>, accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Sanshiro Hosaka. Forthcoming. “The KGB and Glasnost: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*.

<sup>9</sup> J. Michael Waller. 1992. “When Will Democrats Control the Former KGB? Opportunities for Russian-U. S. Cooperation.” *Demokratizatsiya* 1: 1: 30.

<sup>10</sup> Fredo Arias-King. 1992. “On the Path to Reforming the KGB: Proposals and Projects.” *Demokratizatsiya* 1: 1: 98. The author of the present essay is not familiar with the further development of these endeavors.

<sup>11</sup> The succeeding conferences took place in February and October 1993, April and Decem-

realizing that the conference potentially posed a serious threat to the preservation of the traditions of the political police (and their very survival), the Ministry of Security, a main successor to the KGB, sent a group of officials, including Nikolai Kuznetsov, to the conference to manipulate participants and affect the course of discussions.<sup>12</sup>

Chekists and their agents systematically penetrated the USSR and Russian Supreme Soviets, undermining anticipated parliamentary oversight of the security agencies. However bizarre it sounds, Sergei Stepashin was appointed deputy security minister while, as a People's Deputy, continuing to chair the Russian Supreme Soviet Committee on Defense and State Security, a purported oversight body for the security organs. Security ministry official Kuznetsov likewise sat on this parliamentary committee, which was responsible for supervising his ministry.<sup>13</sup> Oleg Kalugin, a former KGB general who rebelled against the Lubyanka and emigrated to the US, pointing to the fact that these officials were participating in the debate over parliamentary oversight of their own ministry, criticized the situation by stating that "Greater absurdity in the field of monitoring the activities of special services cannot be imagined."<sup>14</sup>

At the Grigoryants conference in 1993, one of the most vocal advocates of radical measures was Aleksandr Kichikhin, who had served in the KGB for 20 years. Kichikhin noted that the KGB, now split into multiple agencies, lacked effective parliamentary or presidential oversight and that there were signs of a resurgence of Soviet-era functions and traditions. Kichikhin argued that it would be impossible to reform the KGB, a totalitarian device. He therefore proposed that all successors to the KGB should be abolished—as the Baltic states and former Warsaw Pact countries did—and that the function of criminal investigation should be delegated to those law-enforcement agencies whose competence was strictly circumscribed by the Criminal Code. He also warned that the tradition of suppressing dissidents would be passed on to younger generations if the staff were not replaced.<sup>15</sup>

ber 1994, February and September 1995, September and December 1996, April 1997, and November 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See Nikolai Kuznetsov. 1993. "Parlamentskii kontrol' za deiatel'nost'iu spetssluzhby [Parliamentary Control over the Activities of Special Services]." In E. V. Oznobkina and Liliya Isakova, eds., *KGB: vchera, segodnia, zavtra (Sbornik dokladov) [KGB: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (Collection of Reports)]*. Moscow: Gendal'f, 25–27.

<sup>13</sup> Hosaka, "Perestroika of the KGB," 18–19.

<sup>14</sup> Oleg Kalugin. 1993. "Sravnitel'nyi analiz sistem kontrolya nad deiatel'nost'iu spetssluzhby stran Zapada i Rossii [Comparative Analysis of Systems of Control over the Activities of the Special Services of Western Countries and Russia]." In E. V. Oznobkina and Liliya Isakova, eds., *KGB: vchera, segodnia, zavtra (Sbornik dokladov) [KGB: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (Collection of Reports)]*. Moscow: Gendal'f, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Aleksandr Kichikhin. 1993. "Privelo li rassledovanie avgustovskogo putcha k transformatsiiam v rabote KGB?" [Did the Investigation of the August Putsch Lead to Transformations in the Work of the KGB?]. In E. V. Oznobkina and Liliya Isakova, eds., *KGB: vchera,*

## The August Coup Investigation and Lustration

After the failed coup in August 1991, several commissions were set up to investigate the causes of the coup and the KGB's role therein, but their work was under constant pressure from the KGB and none of them published their results. The state commission led by Stepashin included a few civic experts, such as *The Moscow News* journalist Yevgenia Albats, but they were quickly isolated and ultimately expelled at the instigation of those commission members who were KGB officers.<sup>16</sup> The Russian parliament commission, chaired by People's Deputies Lev Ponomarev and Father Gleb Yakunin, was dissolved under pressure from Russian Foreign Intelligence Chief Evgenii Primakov and Moscow Patriarch Alexy II—both known to have been KGB agents—before ever gaining full access to the KGB archives.<sup>17</sup> *Demokratizatsiya* obtained the transcripts of the Ponomarev commission and published their English translation in 1995-96.<sup>18</sup> The transcripts reveal that Deputy Security Minister Stepashin admitted the KGB's penetration of the members of Democratic Russia and other People's Deputies while refusing to give any details: "Good, let's forget it."<sup>19</sup>

The KGB's internal investigation of the August coup recommended dismissing 13 or so generals for "service discrepancy," but according to Kichikhin, new KGB chairman Vadim Bakatin decided to keep some of them in their posts due to "the need for service."<sup>20</sup> All of the arrested Chekists, including Kryuchkov, were pardoned and released in 1994. As Galina Starovoitova, a Democratic Russia leader and consulting editor of *Demokratizatsiya*, put it, "Even our 'Nuremberg'—the trial on the crime of the CPSU—was unsuccessful and nobody was punished as a result."<sup>21</sup>

The lustration of former party and secret police officials in Eastern European countries was not a "witch hunt" or revenge, but it was pivotal to protecting fragile democracies from infiltration and disturbance by totalitarian remnants. It was at the conference "Past, Present and Future of the KGB" that Starovoitova first raised the issue of the removal of "former"

*segodonia, zavtra (Sbornik докладov) [KGB: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (Collection of Reports)]*. Moscow: Gendal'f, 49-58.

<sup>16</sup> J. Michael Waller. 1994. *Secret Empire: The KGB in Russia Today*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 79-82.

<sup>17</sup> Keith Armes. 1992. "Chekists in Cassocks: The Orthodox Church and the KGB." *Demokratizatsiya* 1: 4: 75.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Michael J. Waller. 1995. "Supreme Soviet Investigation of the 1991 Coup: The Suppressed Transcripts: Part 1: Hearings Concerning the Role of Repressive Organs in the Putsch of 19-21 August 1991." *Demokratizatsiya* 3: 4: 411-50.

<sup>19</sup> Hosaka, "Perestroika of the KGB," 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Kichikhin, "Privelo li rassledovanie avgustovskogo putcha k transformatsiiam v rabote KGB?" 50-51.

<sup>21</sup> Ariel Cohen, Blair A. Ruble, and Nikolai Zlobin. 1999. "Tributes to Galina Starovoitova." *Demokratizatsiya* 7: 2: 304-5.

Chekists from public office. The bill she drafted envisaged prohibiting those who had been secretaries of local party organizations, officials of the Union and republican Party committees, or KGB officers or agents over the past 10 years from being employed at all levels of administrative and educational institutions for a transitional period of 5 to 10 years.<sup>22</sup> There were unsuccessful attempts to pass the bill in the Russian parliament in 1992 and 1997.<sup>23</sup> If the law had been adopted, Vladimir Putin would not have been allowed to serve as a city official in St. Petersburg, let alone as FSB chief and president.

In 1994, chief of the presidential human rights commission Sergey Kovalyov participated in the short-lived presidential commission to review qualifications for promotion to senior positions in security agencies.<sup>24</sup> Kovalyov insisted that at a minimum, KGB fifth-line employees, who had directly engaged in the oppression of dissidents, should be barred from important posts.<sup>25</sup> However, this suggestion was never implemented. Kovalyov did not hide his disappointment, revealing that Yeltsin surrounded himself with many Chekists, including KGB Moscow Directorate officials whom he had known since he led the CPSU Moscow City Committee.<sup>26</sup> In 1999, even before Putin's first inauguration, Chekists occupied such important positions as head of the Presidential Administration, head of personnel affairs, deputy head of the press office, head of the secretariat of the Russian government, and deputy head of the Security Council.<sup>27</sup>

Kovalyov was dismissed from the presidential human rights commission because of his criticism of Russia's "false flag" operations and brutal killings of innocent people during the First Chechen War.<sup>28</sup> The driving

<sup>22</sup> Galina Starovoitova. 1992. *O zaprete na professii dlia provodnikov politiki totalitarnogo rezhima* [On the Ban on Professions for the Conductors of the Policy of the Totalitarian Regime], National Security Archive, At <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/26764-2-o-zaprete-na-professii-dlya-provodnikov-politiki-total>, accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Fredo Arias-King. 1999. "A Tribute to Galina Starovoitova." *Demokratizatsiya* 7: 1: 10–11.

<sup>24</sup> J. Michael Waller. 2004. "Russia: Death and Resurrection of the KGB." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 12: 3: 349.

<sup>25</sup> As recent reports suggest, Putin was not so much a foreign intelligence officer in East Germany as a "fifth-line" operative who hunted for early democrats in Leningrad. Aleksandr Cherkasov. "Kholodnaia golova i korotkaia pamiat'. Pochemu Putin i ego kollegi-chekisty izbezhalii liustratsii i sdelali uspeshnye kar'ery [Cold Head and Short Memory. Why Putin and His Fellow Chekists Escaped Lustration and Made Successful Careers]." *The Insider*. December 15, 2022, At <https://theins.info/politika/257605>, accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Nanci Adler. 2001. "In Search of Identity: The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Recreation of Russia." In Alexandra Barahona De Brito, Carmen Gonzalez-Enriquez, and Paloma Aguilar, eds., *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 290–92.

<sup>27</sup> Mikhail Tsyppin. 2007. "Terrorism's Threat to New Democracies: The Case of Russia." In Thomas C. Bruneau and Steven C. Boraz, eds., *Reforming Intelligence: Obstacles to Democratic Control and Effectiveness*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 293.

<sup>28</sup> Sergei Kovalev. 1995. "How the West Shouldn't React to Events in Chechnya." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 3: 4: 396–98.

force behind the Chechen war was, according to Yevgenia Albats, “those from the military-industrial complex and the former KGB—who celebrate the victory in that power struggle.” Albats condemned the West for turning a blind eye to the “blood bath in Chechnya” and continuing to provide loans to Moscow. Both Kovalyov and Albats deplored Western leaders for continuing to look at Russia through the prism of the leaders’ personalities, such as “Good (bad) Gorbachev” and “Yeltsin is not Zhirinovsky.”<sup>29</sup>

## KGB Archives

Without pervasive secrecy, seven decades of terror and totalitarianism would not have been possible.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, not only was the opening of the KGB archives important for historians who study the Soviet past, but people who had survived the totalitarian regime also had an inherent right to know the truth, making the archives’ opening an essential step in the democratization of post-Soviet Russia.

And the Lubyanka knew this very well. At a closed meeting of the KGB central apparatus in April 1989, KGB chairman Kryuchkov, asked about possible access to the KGB archives, drew attention to the duty of Chekists to “show the utmost concern for our assistants [agents]” so that “they must be absolutely sure that they will not find themselves in an awkward position due to our fault.”<sup>31</sup> KGB regional directorates either created special collections of files on “good” Chekists for public consumption or granted access to archival materials exclusively to Chekist historians. To some degree, Chekists even managed to control the “radical part” of the society “Memorial”—a 2022 Nobel Peace Prize laureate that has sought access to the KGB archives for historical justice—by having a Chekist-historian (the head of the KGB’s tenth department) elected to the Tomsk oblast council of Memorial, thereby enabling the security service “to influence the situation in this public organization.”<sup>32</sup>

There was a concern that KGB documents could be used as a weapon—*kompromat*—to attack political opponents if they were declassified arbitrarily. The first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, understood the political significance and sensitivity of the KGB archives; the first decree he signed after the failed August coup concerned transferring the CPSU and KGB archives to the state repositories of Russia.<sup>33</sup> However, according to historian Yurii Afanas’ev, a member of the parliamentary commission

<sup>29</sup> Yevgenia Albats. 1995. “Eyewitness Accounts from Chechnya.” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 3: 4: 401.

<sup>30</sup> Former KGB colonel Pyotr Nikulin, quoted in Waller, *Soviet Empire*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> See endnote 8 in Hosaka, “Chekists Penetrate the Transition Economy,” 3.

<sup>32</sup> Hosaka, “The KGB and Glasnost: A Contradiction in Terms?,” 16, 20–24.

<sup>33</sup> A. Melenberg. “Nikogda vy nichego ne uznaete [You Will Never Know Anything].” *Novaya Gazeta*. April 18, 2008, At <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2008/04/18/38381-nikogda-vy-nichego-ne-uznaete>, accessed December 26, 2022.



on the archive transfer, the Yeltsin-appointed chair of the commission, Dmitrii Volkogonov, a former political officer in the Soviet Army and Stalin's biographer, was reluctant to proceed with the actual transfer, and the commission was disbanded with the 1993 dissolution of the Russian Supreme Soviet. Instead, the Ministry of Security took the initiative and announced plans to open its reading room for the selective declassification at its disposal.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the declassification of separate files did not occur without fabrications.<sup>35</sup> In the end, practically nothing was disclosed except the hundreds of documents from the Central Committee archive taken out of Russia and made public by Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, a member of the Presidential Commission that considered the legality of the CPSU (the so-called "Bukovsky Archives").<sup>36</sup>

### The Devil Is in the Details

In 1992, Michael Waller warned that the 1992 Law on Security defined "security," vital "interest," and "threat" in a vague way that left room for arbitrary interpretation. The law granted the KGB's successor agencies political police functions. Waller pointed out that since there were no provisions declaring that the new agencies had abandoned the Chekist legacies incompatible with democratic pluralism and human rights, any citizens or organizations calling for fundamental reforms of the security agencies could be considered a threat to "state security."<sup>37</sup>

It is worth noting that Article 8 of the Law expanded the "security system [*sistema bezopasnosti*]" to incorporate citizens and public organizations: "The security system is formed by the organs of legislative, executive, and judicial power; state, social, and other organizations and associations; and citizens participating in ensuring security in accordance with the law as well as by legislation regulating relations in the security sphere." Further, Article 2 enshrined in law the state's provision of legal and social protection for citizens and organizations that "assist in ensuring security in accordance with the law."<sup>38</sup> Along with the closure of the KGB archives, these provisions allowed KGB successor organizations to maintain both old and new agent networks in post-Soviet Russia and abroad.

<sup>34</sup> Amy Knight. 1993. "The Fate of the KGB Archives." *Slavic Review* 52: 3: 585.

<sup>35</sup> Vladimir Abarinov. 1992. "More Troubled Waters at the KGB Archives." *Demokratizatsiya* 1: 2: 41–48.

<sup>36</sup> *The Bukovsky Archives*, At <https://bukovsky-archive.com/>, accessed October 30, 2022. In addition, the so-called "Mitrokhin archive," six suitcases of handwritten notes brought abroad by the former KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin, who defected to the UK in 1992, provides unparalleled insight into hidden KGB operations. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin. 1999. *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>37</sup> J. Michael Waller. 1993. "Russia's Legal Foundations for Civil Repression." *Demokratizatsiya* 1: 3: 111.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–12.

Furthermore, the Law's provision on "extrabudgetary funds" made it possible for the security organs to gain additional funding sources that were beyond the control of both government and parliament. Thus, Chekists could be financed by companies and businesses, to which the Lubyanka continued to dispatch "active reserve" officers.<sup>39</sup> The need for extrabudgetary income was discussed within the KGB when it drafted the first Law on the KGB in 1990.<sup>40</sup> An article in the *KGB Sbornik* argued for "ensuring that the Committee [for State Security] be granted rights to economic activities in order to cover part of the budget." According to the author, Lieutenant Colonel V. Bocharnikov (perhaps Valerii Bocharnikov, subsequently deputy director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service), "in that way, the deep cover positions can be used for our investments in various enterprises." Bocharnikov alleged that such a practice was commonplace among Western intelligence agencies, where "the obtained funds are directed not only to the maintenance of staff but also to cover operational costs."<sup>41</sup>

Waller noted numerous flaws in the Law on Operational Investigative Activity that might allow KGB successors to continue searches and phone interception without viable court and procuracy controls.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Federal Security Service (FSB), established in 1995, took back the investigative and other functions that its predecessor (the Federal Counterintelligence Service) had lost. Pustintsev concluded that without drastic reform of the security agencies, "in the foreseeable future the service will at best remain only a potential detonator of political and social tragedy."<sup>43</sup> The FSB's unlawful arrest and fabrication of an espionage case for an environmental activist and former Navy captain, Alexander Nikitin, in 1996 was a wake-up call to the West to attend to continued human rights violations by the political police. As a Human Rights Watch representative said, "If the FSB can stonewall Nikitin, they can stonewall anybody."<sup>44</sup>

## Revenge

For the participants of the Grigoryants conference, the year 2000 became the year of defeat. What they had warned for a decade reached the point of no return when the "former" Chekist Vladimir Putin ascended to the presidency. In a 2000 article entitled "The Triumph of the KGB," Kalugin wrote that Putin had completed the process that had been begun by Stepashin and Primakov: "Now it's too late to talk about 'KGB—today, tomorrow.'"

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>40</sup> Hosaka, "The KGB and Glasnost: A Contradiction in Terms?," 27.

<sup>41</sup> Hosaka, "Chekists Penetrate the Transition Economy," 5.

<sup>42</sup> Waller, "Russia's Legal Foundations for Civil Repression," 113–14.

<sup>43</sup> Pustintsev, "Russian Political Police: Immortal Traditions and Eternal Threats."

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Nilsen and Jon Gauslaa. 1997. "How the KGB Violates Citizens' Rights: The Case of Alexander Nikitin." *Demokratizatsiya* 5: 3: 407–21.

This is no longer a department nor a service. This is power.”<sup>45</sup> In 2002, the former KGB general was found guilty of high treason by the Moscow City Court and sentenced to 15 years in prison in absentia.

Western leaders largely turned a blind eye to the failure of Russia’s democratization, especially the resurgence of the totalitarian political police in the 1990s. Among the Russian public, narratives welcoming and normalizing a strong security agency for Russia became prevalent, especially in contrast to “Yeltsin’s chaos” and in light of alleged “terrorist threats,” with some Western experts backing these claims by referring to the historical and cultural predispositions of the Russian state.

Back in 1993, given multiple manifestations of the return of the totalitarian political police, Kichikhin had warned that the day was not far off when the participants of the Grigoryants conference would be subject to persecution.<sup>46</sup> In 1994, Grigoryants’ lawyer was on his way to Kaluga to meet a security official who had promised to provide some documents when his car was hit by a truck (the lawyer narrowly escaped death). The office of Grigoryants’ Glasnost Foundation was also burglarized; not only office equipment, but also files were stolen. Finally, in 1995, when Grigoryants was to hold a conference on Russian war crimes in the First Chechen War, his 20-year-old son was run over in front of his apartment.<sup>47</sup> In 2001, Grigoryants lamented that no one had wanted to listen to the warnings about the growing influence of the special services in Russia: “Putin is not Napoleon, he came to power not thanks to his fantastic talents—this is a real indicator: more and more new positions are conquered by the environment to which he belongs.”<sup>48</sup>

Starovoitova was shot dead in 1998 at the age of 52 while continuing to advocate against the FSB’s power abuses and corruption in St. Petersburg. Putin, then FSB director, promised to “personally” lead the investigation into her death.<sup>49</sup> Whether despite or because of Putin’s involvement, the mastermind behind the assassination was not found and her assassination was forgotten, along with the deaths under mysterious circumstances of countless other democratic activists.

The *KGB Sbornik* rejoinder cited at the beginning of this essay likened Yurii Shchekochikhin to Arkady Averchenko. Just as Averchenko had received Lenin’s verdict, Shchekochikhin was labeled an enemy of

<sup>45</sup> Oleg Kalugin. 2001. “Triumf KGB [The Triumph of the KGB].” In Liliya Isakova, ed., *VIII mezhdunarodnaia konferentsiia KGB: vchera, segodnia, zavtra 24-25 noiabria 2000 goda [The VIII International Conference KGB: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow, November 24-25, 2000]*. Moscow: Fond Podderzhki glasnosti i zashchity prav cheloveka “Glasnost,” 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Kichikhin, “Privelo li rassledovanie avgustovskogo,” 56–58.

<sup>47</sup> Waller, “Russia: Death and Resurrection of the KGB,” 350.

<sup>48</sup> Sergei Grigoryants. 2001. *My byli vnutrenne ne gotovy* [We Were Internally Unprepared], At <https://grigoryants.ru/zhurnal-glasnost/my-byli-vnutrenne-ne-gotovy/>, accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Waller, “Russia: Death and Resurrection of the KGB,” 350–51.

the security organs in the 1990 article, which was read by thousands of Chekists. Averchenko died in 1925 at the age of 45, one-and-a-half months after being admitted, unconscious, to the Prague City Hospital with a diagnosis of “weakening of the heart muscle, aortic dilation, and sclerosis of the kidneys.” Aberchenko’s nephew testified that his uncle had never complained about his heart, speculating that he was “helped to die” by the OGPU, a precursor of the KGB, whose agents were “everywhere” at that time.<sup>50</sup> Averchenko’s end largely foreshadowed the fate of Shchekochikhin, who investigated the FSB’s corruption and ties with criminals; the latter was “helped to die” in 2003.<sup>51</sup> According to a *Novaya Gazeta* colleague, in two weeks, the 53-year-old man turned into a very old man, his internal organs started to malfunction, his skin and hair fell out, the whole body became burnt, and he could no longer breathe. These were most likely the effects of a binary chemical weapon. Criminal prosecution was initiated only seven-and-a-half years after the journalist’s passing, and even then it was soon terminated due to the lack of “corpus delicti.”<sup>52</sup> Anna Politkovskaya, Alexander Litvinenko, and other prominent regime critics would meet a similar fate.

### Coda—Chekists are Back

The Soviet Union only half collapsed—taking down only part of the Communist Party. An increasing number of observers are coming to understand how the remaining half has critically impacted the democratization of Russia. The gigantic KGB, split into post-Soviet Russian intelligence and security agencies, has remained unreformed, with the same powers, personnel, and ideology of “Chekism.” In 2000, Kalugin argued that Russia was threatened not by NATO or foreign spies, but “by thieves and fools.” Under the conditions of economic turmoil and demoralization of the population, he indicated, “the chances of [Chekists] staying in power for a long time, finishing off Russia, are greater than ever”—and Chekism is “just one step from Bolshevism.”<sup>53</sup> His prediction was quite accurate. The so-called *sistema*—the intertwining of the FSB, mafia, and bureaucracy that first emerged in St. Petersburg with Putin, then deputy mayor of the city administration, at its helm—now covers the whole of Russia.

A major difference from the Soviet era is that unlike the KGB, which was formally under Party control, the FSB is subservient only to one man. It has become a formidable instrument which the Russian leader uses to

<sup>50</sup> V.D. Milenko. 2010. *Arkadii Averchenko. Zhizn' Zamechatel'nykh Liudei*. Moscow: Molo-daia Gvardiia.

<sup>51</sup> Fredo Arias-King. 2004. “Yuri Shchekochikhin: A Tribute.” *Demokratizatsiya* 12: 1: 158.

<sup>52</sup> Sergei Sokolov. “My stavim tochku [We Put an End].” *Novaya Gazeta*. July 3, 2013. At <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2013/07/03/55342-my-stavim-tochku>, accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Kalugin, “Triumf KGB.”

concentrate power in his own hands and exercise pervasive control over all tiers of state and society—to the point that it is appropriate to characterize contemporary Russia as a “counterintelligence state.”<sup>54</sup> The looming defeat of the Russian armed forces in their full-scale invasion of Ukraine is not synonymous with the breakdown of the counterintelligence state, in which the military, the police, and other law-enforcement agencies are the main targets of the FSB’s penetration and surveillance. As the vanguard of the regime, the security agencies will probably act as the main tool for maintaining subservience and order among other “siloviki” officers.<sup>55</sup>

Scrutinizing the critical path of Russia’s failed democratization as charted on the pages of *Demokratizatsiya* would offer keys to understanding developments in a post-Putin Russia. One thing is perhaps certain: any successor regime, even one with a “liberal” face, will disappoint observers as long as the security services continue to function with the same personnel, principles, and methods.

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<sup>54</sup> John J. Dziak. 1988. *Chekisty: A History of the KGB*. Lanham, MD: Lexington; Waller, *Soviet Empire*.

<sup>55</sup> Sanshiro Hosaka. 2022. *Putin’s Counterintelligence State: The FSB’s Penetration of State and Society and Its Implications for Post-February 24 Russia*, International Centre for Defence and Security / Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, At <https://icds.ee/en/putins-counterintelligence-state/>, accessed December 26, 2022.