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HELSINKI WATCH COMMITTEES IN THE SOVIET REPUBLICS:

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICY*

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Unexpectedly, within two years of the signing by the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada, and thirty-two European states, of the long and solemn Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Helsinki, August 1, 1975, there sprang up as many as five groups of Soviet dissenters claiming that the Helsinki Final Act justified their existence and activity. First, May 12, 1976, there was established in Moscow the Public Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords in the USSR. From November 9, 1976, through April 1, 1977, similar general purpose groups were founded in the Ukraine, in Lithuania, Georgia and Armenia.** The main reason why Helsinki Watch Committees were established in the non-Russian republics was the feeling among their organizers that the non-Russian Groups, all of which continued to cooperate with the Moscow Group, would nonetheless be more effective in publicizing violations of national rights specific to their republics.

Simultaneously, in the United States an official Congressional-Executive Commission (the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) started its work. We have found evidence that the initiators of the official American Commission had been influenced by Soviet dissenters after having been sensitized to the issue by their constituents of East European (Lithuanian, Jewish, Ukrainian, and other) backgrounds. Apparently alarmed at the potential repercussions of the Helsinki Final Act in their country, Soviet authorities arrested and jailed the leading members of the Moscow and all the four republican Groups, but were able to destroy only the Georgian Group. The emergence of the Helsinki Watch Committees in the Soviet Republics thus shows how an international act can unexpectedly serve as a stimulus for dissident activity which in turn is further reinforced by the international feedback provided by sympathetic official bodies and by relatively well-organized émigré communities in the West. Since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act by the Soviet government, the Soviet nationality question—like that of Soviet human rights—has ceased to be an exclusive domestic question, has become internationalized.

**We are not concerned with such more specialized groups within the Soviet Helsinki movement as the Christian Committee to Defend the Rights of Believers (establ. Dec. 27, 1976), the Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes (establ. Jan. 5, 1977), the Group for the Legal Struggle and Investigation of Facts about the Persecution of Believers in the USSR of the All-Union Church of the Faithful and Free Seventh-Day Adventists (establ. May 11, 1978), and the Catholic Committee to Defend the Rights of Believers (establ. November 13, 1978).
The Helsinki Final Act that had been intensively negotiated for close to three years and whose roots go back to an unsuccessful Soviet diplomatic initiative as far back as 1954 is a bundle of solemn yet contradictory promises that are not binding in international law. At first sight, the Soviet government had ample reason to be satisfied: in return for the solemn reemphasis of the de facto recognition of Soviet territorial acquisitions in Eastern Europe in Basket I and equally strong promises of economic, scientific and technological cooperation in Basket II, the Soviet Union endorsed the measures of "Cooperation in Humanitarian and Other Fields," popularly known as Basket III, and consented to the human rights provisions of the "Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations Between Participating States" in Basket I, particularly Principles VII ("Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief") and VIII ("Equal rights and self-determination of peoples"). Principle VIII on the self-determination of peoples was accepted on the insistence of the German Federal Republic despite initial Soviet misgivings: the principle is designed to facilitate an eventual reunification of the two Germanys.\(^2\) The long Principle VII included references to the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants on Human Rights,\(^3\) all of which had been signed by the Soviet Union. Principle VII also contained two sentences that could be interpreted as ensuring the rights of national minorities, viz.:

> The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. [Opening sentence.]

> The participating States on whose territory national minorities exist will respect the right of persons belonging to such minorities to equality before the law, will afford them the full opportunity for the actual enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and will, in this manner, protect their legitimate interests in this sphere. [Fourth sentence.]

Principle VII also included an interesting challenge inserted on the demands of the British delegation:

> They ["the participating States"] confirm the right of the individual to know and act upon his rights and duties in this field. [Seventh sentence.]

The Soviet delegation clearly realized that both Principles VII and VIII could be turned against their country. For example, they initially objected to the inclusion of Principle VIII on self-
determination on the ground that self-determination has been traditionally associated with the rights of colonial peoples to establish their independence. But ultimately the USSR accepted the two principles for three reasons of ascending importance. First, as Harold S. Russell points out so well, built into the text of the two principles were implicit and explicit limitations. The very title of Principle VII parallels Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the USSR fought valiantly and not completely unsuccessfully to have that Principle explicitly refer to that Covenant and the Soviet Union can, therefore, be expected to invoke that Covenant together with its escape clauses whenever it will be called upon to interpret Helsinki Principle VII. Secondly, the Soviet delegation was very much aware that the controversial Principles VII and VIII were preceded by Principle VI on "Nonintervention in internal affairs," which could be interpreted broadly. Thirdly, the seeming concessions by the USSR in Principles VII and VIII were not only limited by implicit and explicit limitations in those very Principles and further restricted by a broad interpretation of preceding Principle VI, but they were essentially promises made to further advance the ongoing process of détente. The Soviet government appeared to gain much more than lose from signing the Helsinki Final Act. It gave the Act the utmost publicity.

It called for a great deal of intelligence and even greater civic courage on the part of Soviet dissenters such as Dr. Yuri Orlov, Elena Bonner-Sakharov, Aleksandr Ginzburg, Lyudmila Alekseeva, Malva Landa, former Major-General Petr Grigorenko (Petro Hryhorenko) and others to cut through the lawyers' and diplomats' reservations and establish an open Public Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords in the USSR in Moscow May 12, 1976, based on the Helsinki Final Act. The initiative of the Moscow dissenters was undoubtedly stimulated by the Final Act's "Basket IV": the agreement to hold a follow-up conference in Belgrade in 1977. In its first announcement the Moscow Group promised to accept and to forward to other signatories of the Final Act any complaints by Soviet citizens about violations of their rights as outlined in the Final Act. The Group would also conduct investigations of its own and would request from the signatories the establishment of International Investigating Committees to examine especially inhumane policies such as the taking away of children from religious parents, the abuse of psychiatric hospitals for political purposes, etc. (nationality problems, however, were not mentioned). The Moscow Group expressed hope that its materials would be taken into consideration at all future meetings.
provided by the Final Act (i.e., implicitly at the Belgrade Conference) and called on the public in the signatories' states to form their own national Groups for the Promotion of the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords (later an International Committee for the Promotion of the Helsinki Accords could be formed). 11

Given the distinguished liberal and multi-national membership of the Moscow Group (e.g., Orlov and Alekseeva were Russians, Hryhorenko was a Ukrainian, Bonner, Ginzburg, and Landa were partly or fully Jewish), the questions emerge, "Why were additional Helsinki Watch Committees organized in four non-Russian republics? What in particular is behind the organization of the first non-Russian Group, the Ukrainian Group, November 9, 1976?" The reason for the formation of the non-Russian Groups is not that the Moscow Group was insensitive to nationality questions. Before the establishment of the Ukrainian Group the Moscow Group issued nine documents, two of which dealt with nationality problems; after the establishment of the non-Russian Groups, by August 1979, the Moscow Group issued ninety more documents, nineteen of which were addressed to nationality concerns. 13 Nevertheless, the non-Russian Helsinki activists apparently were concerned that either the Moscow Group might not be sensitive enough or that there were simply human and national rights issues that could more effectively be raised by non-Russian Helsinki Groups.

The main initiator of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group and the person who indirectly may be responsible for the formation of the Lithuanian, Georgian and Armenian Groups, was the Ukrainian writer and former high Party official Mykola Rudenko. He was personally acquainted with Academician Sakharov and Dr. Valentin Turchin (Sakharov was an unofficial member or at the very least a benefactor of the Moscow Group). With Valentin Turchin and Yuri Orlov, Rudenko joined between 1973 and April 1975 the Soviet Chapter of Amnesty International. 14 Rudenko had the highest regard explicitly for Academician Sakharov and Dr. Turchin, implicitly for Dr. Orlov. 15 Rudenko was also personally acquainted with Major-General Hryhorenko: upon his insistence Hryhorenko joined the Ukrainian Group while remaining a member of the earlier Moscow Group. Clearly Rudenko had demonstrated his lack of national prejudice and his ability to collaborate with Russian dissidents. In all the nineteen documents of the Ukrainian Group issued between November 9, 1976, and December, 1977, there does not appear to be any clear explanation why the Ukrainian Group was formed in addition to the Moscow Group. 16 The true reason is hinted at in a letter that Rudenko wrote to Dr. Andrew Zwarun of the Helsinki Guarantees for Ukraine Committee in Washington, D.C. Wrote Rudenko:

It is incorrect [to say], that our Group is a section of the Moscow one. We collaborate with the Muscovites, they are actively supporting us, for they are genuine democrats. But from the [very] beginning we have decided
not to enter into a relationship of subordination, because we have that, which is not understood by every Russian.17

What is "that which, Rudenko was afraid, not every Russian would understand"? In the last fifteen years (roughly starting with the arrest of Ukrainian intellectuals in August 1965 and continuing after the second wave of mass arrests in 1972) the relations between the Soviet government and the Ukrainian intelligentsia defending the position of the Ukrainian language and culture have been very tense. They have become so bad that some Soviet Ukrainians have become convinced that their country has become engaged in a struggle for national survival. One prominent recent Soviet Ukrainian émigré has said that he personally had come to the conclusion that Ukrainian culture could develop only in an independent Ukraine.18 In any case, wrote Rudenko in an open letter, "the majority of Ukrainian political prisoners had been sentenced for alleged or real nationalism."19

Certain members of the Moscow Group (L. Alekseeva, M. Landa, Y. Orlov, A. Ginzburg, A. Shcharansky, and V. Slepak) in publicly welcoming the formation of the Ukrainian Group November 12, 1976, hinted that they were aware of the situation in the Ukraine being especially difficult.20 Nevertheless, for all the sympathy of the democrats in Moscow, Rudenko and his associates remained convinced that it was up to the Ukrainians to defend their language and culture and that a separate Ukrainian Helsinki Watch Committee was necessary.

The second reason for establishing such a separate Group was perhaps a matter of wounded national pride: though the Ukrainian SSR had been a charter member of the UN, though it had participated in a number of international conferences, and though it had signed and ratified the two international covenants21 on economic, social and cultural rights, and on civil and political rights on which some of the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act were based, the republic as such was not allowed to participate in the Helsinki process, though such European ministates as Liechtenstein and San Marino were.22

The charter members of the Ukrainian Group, besides Rudenko and Hryhorenko, were the writer Oles Berdnyk, the lawyers Lev Lukianenko and Ivan Kandyba (Lukianenko in 1961 had been sentenced to death, but his sentence was on appeal commuted to 15 years' imprisonment), historian Mykola Matushevych and electronics engineer Myroslav Marynovych, former secondary school teacher Oleksii Tykhyy, microbiologist Nina Strokata-Karavansky, and elderly but spry Mrs. Oksana Meshko. When the regime cracked down (Rudenko and Tykhyy were among the first Helsinki Watchers in the Soviet Union to be arrested in February 1977, they were the first to be tried and sentenced to long terms in June 1977)23 the Ukrainian Group added more and more members—some from labor camps and exile—until in December 1979 it was the largest of all Soviet Helsinki Groups, numbering thirty members.
What did the Ukrainian Group do? It tried to defend both individual human rights (injustices committed against political prisoners and their relatives) and collective nationality rights (rights to use the native language) in a long series of memoranda, appeals, individual letters and similar documents. Some of the documents are rather emotional and futuristic in tone bearing the hallmark of Oles Berdnyk, who is a well-known author of science-fiction.24

What effect has the Ukrainian Group had upon the public in the Ukraine? In their summary report covering the first four months of its existence (Memorandum No. 7) the Group said that they had received "hundreds of letters and complaints from all over the Ukraine."25 The existence of the Group was widely publicized by Western Radio: Voice of America reached the cities, the more outspoken Radio Liberty could be best heard in the countryside. Sometimes the complaints were impossible to deal with, the role of the Ukrainian Group being sometimes misconstrued as that of an unofficial ombudsman (one example that was given by a former associate of the Group was that of an old woman complaining that the authorities had taken away her cow, could the Ukrainian Helsinki Group please help?). But there were also more conventional complaints by political and non-political prisoners against abuses of the authorities. Most interesting in this respect is Informational Bulletin No. 4 of November 1978. It contains among other things summaries of nine petitions of prisoners, seven of which had been addressed to the Ukrainian Group. One such petition is by Alexander Stepanovich Levin, probably a Jew, who had again been sentenced to nine years and nine months for "especially malicious hooliganism" after already serving ten years. He complains of a juvenile delinquent being brutally mistreated in camp. Another prisoner's petition is from Yuri Leonidovich Fedorov, who, judging by his name, could be either a Russian or a Ukrainian. A third, Vladimir Ivanovich Shatalov, is most probably a Russian. All of them are serving sentences in a labor camp in the Ukraine and have protested their treatment to the Ukrainian Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords.26 It would seem that at the very least news of the Group's existence had spread to mistreated prisoners—both Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian—and to some very ordinary citizens, quite apart from the dissident Ukrainian intelligentsia.

Why was the Lithuanian Helsinki Group organized November 25, 1976? If the purpose of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was to synthesize the Ukrainian nationalist cultural dissent of the 1960's and 1970's with the All-Union human rights movement on the platform of Helsinki (the KGB were not persuaded: they rejected members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group as bourgeois nationalists in disguise)27, the Lithuanian Group had somewhat more different and perhaps more ambitious goals. It was first designed to be a coalition of all major dissent groups in Lithuania, brought together under, and legitimized by, the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Secondly, the Group
appears to be the first significant move in postwar Lithuania to expand the dissent movement beyond the confines of a narrow ethnic base. Thirdly, very soon after its organization the Lithuanian Group consciously assumed the role of the defender of human and national rights throughout the Baltic republics. The timing of its establishment would nevertheless suggest that an immediate reason for its organization may have been the example given by Ukrainian dissidents some two weeks before, November 9, 1976.

The charter members of the Lithuanian Group were its initiator Viktoras Petkus, by profession a scholar of Lithuanian literature and history, who had had a long-time relationship with the Catholic youth and dissent movement; Jesuit Father Karošša Garuckas; the poet and Lithuanian scholar Tomas Venclova, son of a prominent Communist official; the elderly poetess Ona Lukauskaite-Poskiene, a good acquaintance of both Venclova Father and Son; and the Jewish physicist Dr. Eitan Finkelshtein. Petkus and Father Garuckas represented in the Lithuanian Helsinki Group the Catholic dissent movement; Venclova and Lukauskaite-Poskiene stood for the more secular intellectual nationalist dissent; Dr. Eitan Finkelshtein, a Jewish activist, had been expressly recruited to represent non-Lithuanians.28 Venclova's wife was also Jewish and this, in addition to Finkelshtein, who was especially involved in issues of emigration, provided a second bridge to the Jewish community in Lithuania.

Secondly, there is a certain unique transethnic quality that characterizes the activity of the Lithuanian Group. Petkus was personally acquainted with Dr. Yurii Orlov, Academician Sakharov and Sakharov's close friend biologist Dr. Sergej Kovalev. Kovalev, a defender of human rights, among others defended the rights of Lithuanian Catholics. He was tried in Vilnius in December 1975 and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. "... The fact that a Russian dissident [Kovalev] had openly supported the Catholic Church of Lithuania and had paid for his actions with the loss of freedom made a big impression on the population of Lithuania. The government was pressed to halt demonstrations in support of Kovalev. Throughout Lithuania, hundreds were taken into custody."29 This observation was made by Dr. Eitan Finkelshtein, who, too, was a friend of Academician Sakharov. When Sakharov came to Kovalev's trial in Vilnius he stayed in Finkelshtein's apartment. Petkus wanted to publicly welcome Sakharov at the Vilnius train station with flowers but was intercepted by the KGB and arrested for a few hours: Sakharov might have stayed at the Petkus's except for the fear that this would lead to further persecutions of former political prisoner Petkus.30 Those transethnic cross currents may explain why Petkus immediately and eagerly supported Venclova's idea that the Lithuanian Group be set up on a territorial rather than an exclusive ethnic basis, i.e., that it defend the human and national rights of all citizens living in the Lithuanian SSR irrespective of their nationality and that it include among its charter members non-Lithuanians.
(Dr. Eitan Finkelshtein was offered such membership and he accepted).\textsuperscript{31} Those cross currents explain why among the documents of the Lithuanian Group we find one defending a Russian family of Pentecostalists,\textsuperscript{32} and even one speaking up for Volga Germans.\textsuperscript{33} Most interestingly, those tranethnic crosscurrents helped to make collaboration between the Moscow and the Lithuanian Group particularly close and fruitful: not only was the formation of the Lithuanian Group announced at a press conference in Dr. Orlov's apartment in Moscow December 1, 1976, but two documents of the Lithuanian Group were researched with the help of Mrs. Alekseeva, of the Moscow Group, and then cosigned by her or by her and Orlov.\textsuperscript{34}

The documentary output of the Lithuanian Group is not voluminous: eighteen documents of human and national rights violations, of which issues 13, 15, 16 and 17 have not reached the West as of January 1980, plus the founding declaration, two longer statements to the Belgrade Conference: one on the position of the Roman Catholic Church and one on the "present situation in Lithuania" (i.e., the effects of deportations in the 1940's, the position of the Lithuanian language and culture, and other secular concerns) and, finally, an individual statement by Dr. Eitan Finkelshtein.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, of the fourteen documents received in the West, two, as we have already seen, dealt with Russian Pentecostalists and Volga Germans. In addition, three defended Estonian dissidents Mart Niklus, Erik Udam, and Enn Tarto.\textsuperscript{36} The explanation for this is both simple and deeply significant. All those Estonians had either personally met Petkus in labor camp or had heard much of his reputation. When the Lithuanian Group was organized they immediately appealed to Petkus to have the Group represent the rights of all the Balts, at least so long as no Estonian or Latvian Helsinki Groups were organized. Petkus and his associates gladly complied.\textsuperscript{37} Thus the Lithuanian Group assumed the role of a spokesman not only for Lithuanians but for other Balts as well, even those who were living outside Lithuania.

But for all its cosmopolitan leanings the Lithuanian Group has stood four square in the center of the Lithuanian national movement,\textsuperscript{38} at least with respect to one crucial question, that of national independence. In its opening declaration it alluded "that the contemporary status of Lithuania was established as a result of the entrance of Soviet troops onto her territory on June 15, 1940."\textsuperscript{39} There is a similar restrained reference to Molotov's ultimatum of June 14, 1940, 11 p.m. in the second, "secular" Belgrade statement.\textsuperscript{40} Though there is no written proof our distinct impression is that members of the Lithuanian Group would not object if the status quo ante June 14, 1940, could somehow be restored. For that matter, members of the Moscow Group seem to be of the same opinion.
The Georgian Helsinki Group, formally known as the Public Group to Promote Implementation of the Helsinki Accords in Georgia, which was set up in January 1977, presents a big paradox. It has been established in a republic where the educational and socio-economic standards of the indigenous population have always been very high and where both official (i.e., government sponsored) and unofficial (dissident) nationalist sentiments have run very strong. Georgian language is heard in the cities as well as the countryside, and the number of Russians has continued to decrease from 1959 to 1979 in both relative and absolute terms. Nevertheless, the Georgian Helsinki Group appears inordinately weak, it is the weakest of all the Watch Committees outside of Moscow. Only a single document issued by the Georgian Group as such appears to have reached the West, and it is not a programmatic declaration like those issued by the Ukrainian and Lithuanian Groups, nor do we have any information that such a program had been written at all. After the arrests of the leading members of the Group and especially after the trial and public recantation in May 1978 of its leader, the writer and literary scholar Dr. Zviad Gamsakhurdia the Helsinki Watch Committee in Georgia appears to have become inactive. A weak Group is a strong country?

The solution of this paradox may lie in three factors. First, there had been a vigorous human rights movement in Georgia long before the Helsinki Watch Committee was established. Several of the leaders of the Helsinki Group had already left their mark on Georgian and international public opinion through their activity in the preceding human rights groups, and they may not have attached sufficient importance to their work under the Helsinki Act. It is interesting, e.g., that after the formal establishment of the Watch Committee in Georgia its leader Dr. Gamsakhurdia issued two important documents which he signed qua individual citizen, not as a member of the Committee (one was cosigned by Merab Kostava, another Committee member, but it, too, was not presented on behalf of the Group). Second, the regime moved fast to arrest the leaders of the Group. Third and most important, given the strength of Georgian nationalism among the population and given the tendency of the Georgian Soviet Government to make concessions to that nationalism, it can be argued that the existence of the Helsinki Group in Georgia was less needed than, e.g., in the Ukraine. It would also appear that rather discreetly but still noticeably, concessions were made to some members of the Helsinki Watch Committee in Georgia, possibly in return for their virtual suspension of activity. Only in Georgia was the leader of the Helsinki Group allowed to plea bargain with the regime, which on balance may be a sign of hidden strength rather than weakness.

The charter members of the Georgian Group, according to an announcement in The Chronicle of Current Events, i.e., not in any publication of the Group, were: Beglar Bezhuashvili, a laboratory technician in the Art Department at Tbilisi University; Dr. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the apparent leader of the Group; the two computer
scientists, brothers Drs. Grigori and Isai Goldshtein, who were Jewish; Teimuraz Dzhanelidze, a voice teacher at the music vocational secondary school (tekhnikum) in Rustavi; and the Georgian art-historian Victor Rtskhiladze.\textsuperscript{45} An immediate controversy arose as to whether or not writer and musicologist Merab Kostava was a member of the Group—he was. Later members of the Group may have been religious activist Valentina Pailodze and Elisaveta Bykova-Goldshtein (the wife of Isai Goldshtein).\textsuperscript{46}

What has the Georgian Group done and what has been the impact of its activity? It is impossible to say for certain because the only document issued by the Group has dealt with the harassment and dismissal from work of one of its members, Rtskhiladze.\textsuperscript{47} We can, however, speculate a little and say that the inclusion of the two Goldshtein brothers, both of whom had been refused permission to emigrate, and the formal title of the Group (Public Group to Promote the Helsinki Accords in Georgia rather than Georgian Public Group) may have been an indication that the Georgian Group like the Lithuanian Group, intended to systematically defend the rights of all citizens of the republic, Georgians and non-Georgians. Furthermore, Rtskhiladze was known as the champion of the return of the so-called Meskhetian Turks, the native Moslem population of southern Georgia who had been deported in World War II. On the other hand, to judge from the contents of the Georgian Herald No. 1, an underground publication edited by Gamsakhurdia in 1976, the Group probably would have defended such national Georgian rights as continued higher education in Georgian, publication of college textbooks in Georgian, and the right to submit academic dissertations in their native language, rather than Russian. The Georgian Herald also denounced torture and other violations of human rights. Like the Ukrainian Group, the Georgian Group could hardly have ignored the rather heavy-handed attempts by the central government to impose Russian in Georgian education.\textsuperscript{48}

Despite the fact that the Armenian Group was formally established in Gen. Hryhorenko’s apartment in Moscow, April 1, 1977, it should be taken seriously. Its documentary output is limited, but of high quality, it also has continued to function at least through the summer of 1979. The formal leader of the Group was the economist Eduard Bagratovich Arutyunyan. The second founding member and its real moving spirit was physicist turned theologian Robert Nazaryan. The third founding member was engineering student Samvel Osyan. Within half a year of its establishment the Armenian Group was joined by an expelled student of pedagogy compelled to become manual worker Shagen Arutyunovich Arutyunyan (no relation to Eduard Bagratovich Arutyunyan) and expelled philology student, former political prisoner and then factory worker Ambartsum Khlgatyan.

Why was the Armenian Group organized in April 1977? Given the traditional rivalry between the Armenians and Georgians in the Caucasus we are tempted to remark that once the Georgian human rights
activists organized their Group in 1977, their Armenian counterparts were soon to follow. We are not persuaded that such a motive was altogether absent in the minds of Nazaryan and Eduard Arutyunyan, but it would be an exceedingly shallow interpretation to see in this the main, perhaps even a major reason. Another explanation has been provided by Robert Nazaryan himself when he told Western correspondents at the April 1977 press conference in Moscow: "At a time when authorities wanted to crush the Moscow and the Ukrainian Groups we have started our own Group to show our solidarity in this dangerous moment." Orlov had had many ties with Armenia (he was corresponding member of the Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences, e.g.) and the press conference was held in the apartment of General Petro Hryhorenko, a member of both the Moscow and the Ukrainian Groups. Nazaryan was sincere in stressing the motive of solidarity. Nevertheless, it might perhaps be argued that the main reason for the establishment of the Armenian Group was a recent shift in the attitudes that many Armenians had toward the Russians: traditionally anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic and, therefore, pro-Russian, in the 1960's and 1970's the Armenians began to re-evaluate their position vis-à-vis the regime and the Russians.

The composition of the Group reflected the range of those new attitudes. Eduard Arutyunyan had been born in Mountainous Karabagh. The issue of the return of Mountainous Karabagh with its overwhelming Armenian majority from under the rule of the Azerbaidzhan SSR to the Armenian SSR has constituted an increasingly bitter dispute between Armenian patriots and the central regime for decades, especially since the Azerbaidzhanis have mistreated the Armenian population. Some Armenians would raise the maximal demand for the return of Western, Turkish occupied Armenia; many Armenians would like the Soviet government to press the Turkish government to acknowledge its guilt for the genocide of 1915, which it has refused to do for sixty-five years; practically all Armenians cannot understand why the central Soviet government if it be genuinely interested in Armenian good will does not quickly transfer the Karabagh province to Armenia. In the Armenian Helsinki Group Eduard Arutyunyan would press for a solution of the Karabagh problem.

Robert Nazaryan represented the great moral and quasi-political role of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which by and large appears to have succeeded in finding a modus vivendi with the Soviet authorities. The Church has also played an important role in the world-wide Armenian diaspora. Furthermore, as respected deacon of that Church, Nazaryan was able to collect contributions in support of Armenian political prisoners.

Osyan did not play any significant role—under pressure from the regime he became inactive. Ambartsum Khlgatyan had been a member of the small, secret, and ultimately suppressed Armenian Democratic Union of the 1940's. The Union did not have any concrete territorial or political goals besides introducing genuine democracy in Armenia.
Members of the Union argued that it was the Western democracies that had really won World War II, not Stalin, and that it was in the interests of Armenia to learn from the United States and Great Britain how to nominate and elect responsible democratic leaders. Khlagatyan appears to have remained faithful to the liberal and pro-Western ideas of his youth.

Shagen Arutyunyan was a founding member in 1966 of the National United Party of Armenia (NOP). The long-term goal of nationalist NOP was: "the solution to the Armenian question: the establishment of a national state governing the entire territory of historic Armenia, the unification of all Armenians in diaspora throughout the world into a territorially and governmentally established homeland, and a national renaissance." The first intermediate goal was the achievement of independence by Armenia through a peaceful referendum in which "an absolute majority vote of the population of Armenia as well as citizens of Armenia temporarily living in other countries" would decide whether or not Armenia would secede from the Soviet Union. The regime clamped down hard sending the NOP activists to jail and prison camp for many years.

What did the Armenian Group do? It issued seven documents, including the almost desperate final appeal to Armenians abroad of February 8, 1978, starting with the possibly premature statement: "The Armenian Helsinki Group has been crushed." The following general points can be made: First, the quality of the documents, particularly that of the first declaration and of the announcement (or memorandum) to the Belgrade Conference and of its supplement is high. The documents bristle with facts, contain closely reasoned arguments. Second, as in the case of the Ukrainian Group, human and national rights are considered inextricably intertwined. The initial Declaration is particularly effective in that it presents thirteen concrete demands often firmly anchored with legal references: demands 1-5 are general human rights (e.g., point 1: "to defend the civic, political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and freedoms which are inherent to human dignity and are vital for man's free and full development") whereas points 6-9 present specifically Armenian demands (point 6: "free movement in and out of the country ... but cooperating all the while with the activities aimed at encouraging the concentration of Armenians within the boundaries of the Armenian Republic"); point 7 on the admission of the Armenian SSR to the UN; point 8 on the reintegration of Karabagh and Nakhichevan; point 9 on more widespread use of Armenian as a state language. Points 10-13 are more instrumental and procedural in nature (e.g., point 12, on assembling, studying and circulating data relative to the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act). Thirdly, the most urgent concern of the Armenian Group, to judge from the third paragraph of the Declaration and from the repeated appeal for collections of February 1976 with a postscript of May 1977 is to help the fourteen jailed victims of the nine secret political trials of 1973-1974, which involved members and sympathizers of NOP.
What has the Soviet government done? The Soviet nationality policy in the 1960's and 1970's (especially under Brezhnev) has been rather harsh toward any demands for cultural and political autonomy that have been raised by the non-Russian elites and peoples. The German scholar Gerhard Simon sees in the regime's policy a reaction to the growing national consciousness of the non-Russians:

The harsher tones and the restrictive measures, too, ... are to a large extent a reaction of the leadership to a growing national self-consciousness and to the increasing expectations of the peoples, who do not really (gerade nicht) see their future in a pushing back of the particular and specific, but in their acknowledgment and development.\(^5^7\)

On the other hand, one could argue that the "growing national self-consciousness and the increasing expectations" of the non-Russian peoples in the USSR stem from their long-range demographic, educational-cultural and socio-economic development under Soviet rule, that they have been stimulated by the growth of nationalism in Eastern Europe and the Third World and that to a large extent they constitute a reaction to the impatience with which the Soviet regime since the late 1950's—and especially since 1961—has tried to bring about linguistic assimilation and maximum politico-administrative unity in the name of "the Soviet people, a new historical community." In any case, though the central government in the foreseeable future might perhaps win the war of assimilation and integration with respect to the Belorussians, e.g., and fight it to a draw with the Ukrainians, it has already lost several important battles: the new USSR constitution of 1977 circumscribes more narrowly the position of the Union republics, but does not abolish them altogether, and the right of secession has not been eliminated;\(^5^8\) furthermore, after a language demonstration in Georgia and somewhat more discreet requests by Armenian Party authorities, the new state constitutions of the Georgian, Armenian, and also of the Azerbaidzhani SSR have retained references to the indigenous languages being "state languages"—the assimilators tried to eliminate that anomaly in the draft constitutions, but failed.\(^5^9\) Though those battles took place in 1977 and 1978, the battle lines had been drawn long before the establishment of the Helsinki Watch Committees in the non-Russian republics.

Before the establishment of the Helsinki Groups there had been, roughly speaking, an elite human rights movement centered in Moscow and more broadly based, perhaps even mass-based, nationalist and religious movements in the republics. The relatively narrow human rights movement did have a sprinkling of non-Russian associates in the republics (e.g., Rudenko in the Ukraine, Gamsakhurdia in Georgia) but those ties were personal rather than representative of the republican concerns, accidental rather than systematic. In the
Helsinki movement in the Soviet Union for the first time in the history of Soviet nationality relations the liberal dissident elites from Russia and from four non-Russian republics organized in independent Helsinki Watch Committees started cooperating with each other on a systematic basis using the Helsinki Accords for legitimizing their activity. It did not matter that in achieving a synthesis of concern for both individual human and collective nationality rights the Soviet Helsinki activists might have stretched Principles VII and VIII of Basket I beyond the limits envisaged by the cautious diplomat-lawyers who had drafted them—the Soviet Helsinki monitors, Russian and non-Russian alike—acted very much in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants referred to in Principle VII. Above all, by acting together the Helsinki monitors challenged the old imperial principle of "divide and rule" and thus—viewed in a long prospective—constituted a serious danger to the continued stability of the Soviet Empire, officially known as the Soviet Union.

The Soviet government could also not ignore the international implications. The Helsinki Final Act was a solemn statement of intentions signed by 35 countries, which—ironically—has been exceedingly well publicized externally and internally by the Soviet government itself. Then in August 1975 an anonymous group of Soviet dissenters who may or may not have been identical with some of the Helsinki monitors persuaded an American Congressional delegation that it would be a good idea to set up monitoring commissions. The result of this idea, as re-shaped by Representative Millicent Fenwick and former US Senator Clifford P. Case, both of New Jersey, was the establishment of the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) by June 1976. This led at least some KGB investigators to charge Orlov "with organizing the Moscow Helsinki Group at the behest of Congress" and with managing the Group "on the orders of Congress and at the personal direction of Congressman Fascell," the head of the US CSCE.

The truth is different, but the role of the Western powers, particularly of the United States, in helping the Helsinki Watch Committees in the USSR should not be ignored. They rendered the Groups indispensable technical aid and also furnished them welcome moral and diplomatic support. Many Soviet citizens heard about the establishment of the Groups from Western radio: BBC, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America, and particularly, Radio Liberty. As to moral support, the US CSCE held hearings on the Helsinki Monitors in the Soviet Union to which it invited as witnesses such recent émigrés as Tomas Venclova, Lyudmilla Alekseeva, Aleksandr Ginzburg, Petr Vins, who had joined the Groups in the USSR. The Commission has been very energetic and active in publishing the documents of the Groups, at US Government expense. Above all, members and staff of the US CSCE were made delegates to the Belgrade review conference in 1977-78 where—though behind closed doors—they helped to criticize
the Soviet delegates for specific violations of the Helsinki Final Act (a complex subject that really calls for separate treatment). Furthermore, from the Soviet point of view, to add insult to injury, the emergence of the Helsinki Watch Committees appears to have reinforced the activity of the generally nationalist and anti-Soviet émigré communities (the well-organized Balts in Sweden and the United States, e.g.). The latter prevented in 1975 President Ford from recognizing de jure the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR and helped him inaugurate Radio Liberty broadcasts in all three Baltic languages in September 1975. A group of Ukrainian-Americans formed the Helsinki Guarantees for Ukraine Committee in Washington, D.C.—Rudenko was in contact with that group, transmitted to it some Ukrainian Group documents for publication, and its head Dr. Zvarun was invited to testify on behalf of the Ukrainian Group before the US CSCE. Another prominent Ukrainian-American witness on more general questions was Professor Lev E. Dobriansky, long-time President of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America.

In an apparent attempt to nip the development of the Helsinki Groups in the bud, the Soviet government resorted to a combination of relatively non-violent and relatively violent measures, not all of which were successful. An unsuccessful but very imaginative attempt was that of KGB major Albert Molok who on three occasions in early April 1977 offered to former Estonian political prisoner Erik Udam half a million rubles in expense money if Udam would set up a bogus Estonian dissident committee and establish contact with American diplomats in Moscow. Udam diplomatically refused and to protect himself publicized the attempt through the Lithuanian Group. Tomas Venclova January 25, 1977, was given a Soviet passport valid for 5 years to enable him to accept a teaching position at the University of California. In the United States Venclova, however, continued to actively represent the work of the Lithuanian Group, was subsequently deprived of Soviet citizenship. Lyudmilla Alekseeva was allowed to emigrate to the U.S. with her husband and one son February 22, 1977. She has continued her work as the Moscow Group’s Official Representative Abroad. Gen. Hryhorenko also was allowed to leave the country in November 1977, then stripped of his Soviet citizenship in February 1978.

On the other hand, Aleksandr Ginzburg was arrested February 3, 1977; Mykola Rudenko and Oleksii Tykhy were arrested February 5, 1977; Dr. Yuri Orlov was arrested February 10, 1977; April 7, 1977, was arrested the head of the Georgian Group, Gamsakhurdia; in August, 1977, came the turn of Petkus, the de facto head of the Lithuanian Group; Nazaryan of the youngest Armenian Group, was arrested December 1977.

It would be both very depressing and idle to chronicle the persecution of all the 68 active Helsinki Group Members. More interesting are some subtle and not so subtle measures used by the
KGB to combat the Helsinki monitors. At first the Helsinki monitors would be tried for anti-Soviet agitation and similar political offenses. This left them at least the dignity of being officially recognized as prisoners of conscience. More recently the Soviet prosecution has lodged against them ordinary criminal charges, some very nasty, but none very plausible. The regime has offered deals to some of the most prominent dissidents. Rudenko, who had been a very high Party official (the Secretary of the Ukrainian Writers Union under Stalin, 1947-1950), and who suffers from a festering wound going back to World War II, was given a very harsh sentence: seven years in labor camp. But he was not immediately shipped off to serve his term: the regime wanted to obtain a confession from him in return for a reduced sentence but failed. On the other hand, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who admittedly had previously been the subject of three assassination attempts—twice with poison gas—confessed almost everything at his trial in May 1978, repented, and incriminated one American diplomat and several Western news correspondents. For cooperating with the prosecution, Gamsakhurdia was sentenced to three years of labor camp and two years of exile but was pardoned at the end of June 1979. For discrediting himself and attempting to discredit the Georgian Helsinki movement, Gamsakhurdia was not only pardoned but may have won additional concessions: Soviet artillery would no longer train their gunners in an area containing invaluable ancient Georgian cave monasteries, the authorities would prosecute a corrupt bishop of the Georgian Church whom they had stubbornly tolerated. Possibly there were also concessions on Georgian remaining the "state language" of Georgia (in the latter case the street demonstration of April 14, 1978, helped immensely). Finally, and most disturbingly, it should be mentioned that some opponents of the Soviet regime have been killed under mysterious circumstances and that attempts have been made to intimidate through them members of the Helsinki Groups.

Clearly, the Soviet government has set its course on a total suppression of the Helsinki Groups, their total destruction by hook or by crook. In a way this is understandable for the Helsinki monitors are undermining the legitimacy of the present Soviet order with the help of Western governments and nations. But in the long run the present course of the Soviet government is bound to have tragic consequences for the peoples of the Soviet Union; for it is in the Helsinki Groups that some of the most reasonable and moderate dissenters, both Russian and non-Russian, have found their vocation. If the moderates are destroyed, who will take their place in an eventual transformation of the Soviet Union?

2Russell, loc. cit., p. 269.

3See "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" and "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" in AJIL, Vol. 61, No. 3 (July 1967), pp. 861-890. President Carter signed both documents (see N.Y. Times, 6 October 1977, p. 2) but the US Senate has not consented to the covenants as of the time of writing (June 1980).


5 Ibid.

6Russell, loc. cit., p. 269.

7 Ibid., p. 268.

8 Ibid., p. 270.

9Compare, e.g., the extensive coverage in Pravda, August 1, 1975, pp. 1-3, and Aug. 2, 1975, pp. 1-6, including full text of agreement on pp. 2-6, with the relatively skimpy coverage in N.Y. Times, August 1, and 2, 1975.


See A. Boiter, SDS 30, p. 143.

Wrote M. Rudenko: "As far as my political views were concerned, that question was not discussed at all. A. D. Sakharov and V. F. Turchin possess such a broad perspective and such tolerance, which make them genuine democrats." See Rudenko, Ekonomichni Monolohy (New York: Suchasnist', 1978), p. 106n.; emphasis in original.
Reference is to the declaration and the eighteen memoranda of the Ukrainian Group. It should be noted, however, that Memoranda Nos. 3, 10, 12-17 have not reached the West as of June 1980.

See excerpt from letter in Smoloskyp press release (in Ukrainian) of May 30, 1977, p. 2. In his letter to Y. Bilinsky of June 2, 1980, p. 1, Mr. Oasy Zinkewych, one of the editors of Smoloskyp, has identified this extract as coming from a letter from M. Rudenko to Dr. A. Zwarun.

See Ivan Dziuba, Internationalism or Russification? (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968). See also the underground Ukrainian Herald (especially Dissent in Ukraine: The Ukrainian Herald Issue 6 [of March 1972] [Baltimore: Smoloskyp, 1977] and Ethnocide of Ukrainians in the USSR: The Ukrainian Herald Issue 7-8 [of Spring 1974] [Baltimore: Smoloskyp, 1976]). The neo-Marxist Leonid Plyushch told at a hearing in the US Congress: "Most of the people who are labeled as bourgeois nationalists [in the Ukraine] are only demanding that their culture be permitted to develop freely. In this instance I am more Catholic than the Pope himself, because I believe that the development of Ukrainian culture is utopian within the framework of the Soviet Union. Therefore, I am for the secession of the Ukraine from the Soviet Union...


20 See their announcement about the formation of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, reproduced in UPR, p. 10. The relevant sentences read: "We draw attention to the fact that those who on the territory of the Ukraine attempt to gather and transmit to the public information about violations of human rights, and especially those who want to transmit such information to heads of state—encounter extraordinarily difficult obstacles. This contradicts both the spirit and the letter of the Helsinki Accords . . . . The creation of the Ukrainian Public Group under the circumstances which prevail in the Ukraine is an act of great manliness."


23 (Continued)
Ginzburg had been arrested earlier (Feb. 3, 1977), Orlov was arrested
Feb. 10, 1977 - see US CSCE, Profiles: The Helsinki Monitors
(revised Dec. 10, 1979), pp. unnumbered. On Rudenko's and Tykhy's
trial, see UPR, pp. 265-342.

24A full inventory of the documentary output of the Ukrainian
Group has not yet been made. According to the US CSCE the Group
published through the late summer of 1979 over 30 declarations and
appeals and ten information bulletins (US CSCE, comp., Fact Sheet:
unnumbered). UPR contains 56 documents exclusive of the information
bulletins. Berdnyk's memoranda are apparently those numbered No. 5
and 7.

25See HWC, p. A-61 or US CSCE, Basket III Hearings, Vol. IV,
pp. 75 ff., or UPR, pp. 109 ff.

26Documents consulted at Prolog Research Corporation, New
York. They are being published.

27Bilinsky's interview with Mr. Petro Vins, September 30, 1979.

28Interview with Professor Tomas Venclova, October 11, 1979.
See also below.


30Interview with Professor Tomas Venclova, October 11, 1979.

31Ibidem.

32Document No. 8 (June 2, 1977), "Persecution of the Vasilev
Family, Russian Pentecostals Living in Vilnius, Lithuania," in HWC,
pp. A-92 to A-93 or US CSCE, Reports of Helsinki Accord Monitors in

33Document No. 6 (March 19, 1977), "On Discrimination Against
the Volga Germans in the USSR," in HWC, p. A-90 or US CSCE, Ibid.,
p. 161.

34Document No. 1 (November 25, 1977), "On the Situation of
Two Lithuanian Catholic Bishops," in HWC, pp. A-84 to A-85; also
SDS 30, pp. 57-68, and US CSCE, Reports of the Helsinki-Accord Monitors
that only the SDS 30 version has Alekseeva's and Orlov's cosignatures,
which have, however, been authenticated by Tomas Venclova. Technically
the document is counted as one of the Lithuanian, not the Moscow Group.
Secondly, Moscow Group Document No. 15 (December 8, 1976), "On the
34 (Continued)


Interview with Professor Tomas Venclova, Oct. 11, 1979.


"Announcement of Formation and Statement," last paragraph of statement, in HWC, p. A-82 or US CSCE, Reports . . . , Vol. I, p. 120.


43 Notably the movements of the Georgian Meskhetians in the 1960's, the Georgian Jews (since 1969), the Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in Georgia (since the summer of 1974). Gamsakhurdia, Kostava and Rtskhiladze belonged to the last group.

44 See "Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Letter to Minister of Culture of the Georgian SSR Ol'gar Taktakishvili, First Deputy Minister of Culture N. Gurabanidze," February 28, 1977—see HWC, p. A-158 or AS 3115 in Materialy samizdata (MS), No. 4/78 (Jan. 20, 1978); secondly, "Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava: V. Zhvaniia has been Sentenced for Bombings," March 19, 1977, see HWC, pp. A-159 to A-161 or AS 3114 in MS, No. 4/78.

According to a very competent and careful oral source, neither of the two had really joined the Group. Mrs. Pailodze belonged, however, to the kindred Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in Georgia.

He was dismissed March 9, 1977. See Note 42, above.


See UPI dispatch from Moscow, April 4, 1977.


52 Interview with Mr. Ambartsum Khlgatyan, September 26, 1979.


54 Interview with Mr. Ambartsum Khlgatyan, September 26, 1979.


57 (Continued)


59 Best source is Ann Sheehy, "The National Languages and the New Constitutions of the Transcaucasian Republics," RL 98/78 in RL, Vol. 22, No. 19 (May 12, 1978). Mrs. Sheehy may, however, underestimate the importance of the language demonstration or near-riot in Tbilisi. See our HWC, pp. 5-63 to 5-65, 5-76.


62 On June 3, 1977, see loc. cit. (note 34, above), pp. 29-37.

63 See note 60, above, pp. 8-21.


66 We have documented this at length in our HWC, pp. 3-9 ff.

67 On February 24, 1977. See Note 61, above, pp. 62-76.

69. See its document No. 7, as cited in Note 36, above.

70. US CSCE, Profiles: The Helsinki Monitors (rev. Dec. 10, 1979), unpaged. See also Note 61, above, documenting Venclova's appearance before the US CSCE.

71. Profiles . . .

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.


75. For instance, in February 1979, Vasyl Ovsienko, an associate of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was sentenced to three years "for resisting the militia in the performance of their duty"—see AS No. 3594, MS 18/79. January 21, 1980 another associate of that Group, Mykola Horbal got five years for "attempted rape"—Svoboda (Jersey City, N.J.), January 31, 1980, p. 1. June 3, 1980, there started a trial in Yakutsk. The defendant is the well-known responsible Ukrainian dissident journalist and new [since the fall of 1979] Ukrainian Group member Viacheslav Chornovil. The charge is rape. (Svoboda, June 5, 1980, p. 1). June 6, 1980, Chornovil was sentenced to five years of labor camp (ibid., June 11, 1980, p. 1).

76. See the protest of his wife Raisa in MS, 15/78 (April 18, 1978) and the article of his friend Gen. Hryhorenko, "Nezlamni . . . ," Part 2, Svoboda, Nov. 24, 1979, p. 2.

77. We have discussed Gamsakhurdia's involved career in detail in HWC, pp. 5-54 to 5-59 and 5-65 to 5-69.

78. There is first the secret trial and exceedingly hasty execution of three Armenians (Stepan S. Zatikyan, Akop Stepanyan and Zoven Bagdasaryan) in the last days of January 1979. They had been accused of causing an explosion in the Moscow subway January 8, 1977, which killed several passengers (see on this especially Malva Landa's lengthy exposé, Stepan Zatikyan, Akop Stepanyan i Zoven Bagdasaryan prigovoreny k smertnoi kazni po stal'sifitsirovannym obvineniam (February-May 1979), AS No. 3676, in MS 28/78). Shagen Arutyunyan of the Armenian Helsinki Group had known Zatikyan as a co-founder of NOP, had been closely questioned in that affair. Or take the case of the very popular non-conformist Ukrainian rock composer Ivasiuk. He left the Lviv Conservatory in the company of
a stranger during Easter, April 22-24, 1979. Within days the militia
began to speculate that he probably committed suicide. In about a
month his body was discovered hanging high up in a tree in a forest.
If the samizdat reports rather than the official version are correct,
his eyes had been gouged out, which would make it the strangest
suicide ever (see "Ivasiuk Volodimir," n.d., n. place, MS No. 45/79
[December 24, 1979], 2 pp. AS No. 3800.) Also "Big Brother is
Sichko father and son attend the funeral, give an oration, are soon
arrested and then jailed. On Dec. 4, 1979, Petro Sichko (Sr.)
is sentenced to 3 years of severe regimen camp, Vasyl Sichko (Jr.)
to 3 years of moderate regimen camp. See Svoboda: The Ukrainian