

Narcotics explosion in Russia reported

by Rachel Douglas

The Moscow daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (*Independent Newspaper*) on May 7 reported an explosion of drug addiction and narcotics traffic in Russia.

"According to the latest expert estimates," reported Aleksandr Barinov, "5.5-7.5 million people regularly use narcotics in the territory of the former U.S.S.R. At the beginning of 1991, this figure was only 1.5 million. Specialists believe that the process of headlong narcoticization of the country will continue for the next 5-7 years. . . . The number of drug addicts in Russia at that time will comprise probably several tens of millions of people. In the opinion of the chief of the Moscow Bureau for Struggle with Narco-business, Valentin Roshchin, Russia is now traversing the classic route of the development of drug addiction in North America and Europe. The difference is only in the rate. What took decades in other countries, we are doing in years. And there remains practically no time for the states to mull over and experiment in the battle with this evil. . . . Otherwise, it will inevitably go out of control and make a bid for state power, as happened in Latin America and Southeast Asia."

Barinov reported that drug consumption in Russia has moved from massive marijuana use, to a proliferation of more rapidly addictive narcotics. "While earlier, a 'new' drug would appear on the Soviet 'market' every 5 or 10 years, in the capital alone, during the first three months of this year there began to be distributed three new, powerful stimulants. In September 1991, Moscow [investigators] first seized cocaine from a Moscow drug dealer, which expert analysis established was of South American origin."

No response to the threat

In 1990, *EIR* reported on the skyrocketing growth in narcotics use and trafficking with the fall of the Iron Curtain. *EIR* warned that unless a coordinated strategy for a war on drugs was undertaken, including shutting down drug money-laundering through the banking system, rejecting International Monetary Fund conditionalities which openly encourage drug trafficking, and rejecting the "free market," the newly independent states of the former East bloc would be flooded with drugs.

In an *EIR* story on Nov. 9, 1990, entitled " 'Dope, Inc.' Doubling Every Five Years; Next Target Europe," Dennis

Small wrote that "with the peaceful revolutions that have swept eastern Europe . . . there is a new situation. Just as this New Europe is humanity's greatest hope in terms of the potential for economic development, so too is it viewed by Dope, Inc. as a potential new and larger market for drugs. And the traditional European mafias are on board for this project."

In the same issue, Muriel Mirak-Weissbach wrote, "That the drug cartels were setting their sights on Europe was already clear in the trends of 1989, which showed a jump in drug deaths and in confiscated drugs." She noted that as the Iron Curtain fell, "the international drug cartel was among the first enterprising concerns to set up shop in the East."

A drug lobby in government

Barinov warned that a powerful faction in Parliament, which is pushing for drug legalization, is misguided—or worse. "The main argument of a segment of Russian parliamentarians and radical human rights organizations fighting for legalization of drug addiction is, as is well known, the experience of the western democracies—the U.S.A., Europe, and particularly Holland. . . . Last year, the Supreme Soviet of Russia annulled the criminality of repeated non-medical use of narcotics. Now, there are intense debates going on about an article in the draft of a new Criminal Code for the Russian Federation, on [criminal] responsibility for possession of narcotics. According to the opinion that is widespread here, narcotics are legal there, generally available, and their use is considered one of the manifestations of individual freedom. . . . Investigators do not exclude the existence of an already quite powerful 'narco-lobby' in our higher echelons of power, with which the recent changes in article 224 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code might have been connected."

The *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article covered the status of drug dealers within Russian organized crime; the role of Azerbaijani mafiosi and Azerbaijan's cutoff of information-sharing with Russian authorities; the rise of former Soviet citizens as drug couriers; and the opening up of former U.S.S.R. drug mafia ties with foreign cartels, including for the export of "Soviet" marijuana to Europe and import of other drugs into the member-nations of the Community of Independent States.

Barinov wrote that "there remains one serious obstacle in the path of 'import'—the nonconvertibility of the ruble. Although the 'first swallow' of spring has already flown in: In March, investigators in Moscow detained several traders who had brought a 1.5 million ruble shipment of opium from Afghanistan. With the ruble becoming convertible, specialists believe, there will arise yet another area for joint activity by our narco-mafia and foreign ones—money laundering. After all, in Soviet legislation there are not any mechanisms for tracing the origin of monies deposited in a business, never mind structures" for preventing this.