

No Safe U.S. Haven for Hatemongers

By [Leonid Komarovsky](#)

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Just as U.S.-Russian relations enter a new phase in a policy aimed at rapprochement, an escalating scandal involving the case of a fugitive businessmen-cum-State Duma deputy is threatening to throw a wrench into the wheels of this “reset” machine. Ashot Yegiazaryan, a member of the notoriously anti-Semitic Liberal Democratic Party, fled Russia last summer following a series of unraveling business deals and the resulting fallout with his business partners, including disgraced former Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov. Stopping over in the south of France for a few months, he then proceeded to Beverly Hills, California, where he is reportedly considering a request for political asylum. At home, Russian prosecutors have decided to strip Yegiazaryan of his immunity and press criminal charges against him for allegedly defrauding his former business partners.

As a long-standing member of the Liberal Democratic Party, or LDPR, and, consequently, its anti-Semitic and xenophobic agenda, Yegiazaryan does not deserve safe haven in the United States. In the last couple of weeks, callers to my daily Russian-language radio show have voiced concerns over Yegiazaryan’s and his party’s well-established record of anti-Semitism and hate speech. On March 1, I conducted an informal poll of my listeners, asking them

whether they believed the United States should provide him with safe haven should he seek it. Ninety-one percent said “no.” As demonstrated by the recent scandal following Christian Dior designer John Galliano being caught on tape spouting anti-Semitic vitriol, anti-Semitism remains an insidious scourge of our society. Washington must follow the example of the fashion label, which moved with lightning speed to distance itself from its tainted designer and get real on anti-Semitism, anti-Islamism and other hatemongering creeds. If there is a database containing names of terrorists banned from entering the United States, there should likewise be one for characters like Yegiazaryan.

Surrounded by a veritable army of expensive lobbyists and lawyers, Yegiazaryan has been making the rounds in Washington and speaking to the press, presenting himself as the latest victim of Russia’s capricious justice system and a dissident determined to expose corruption at the “top of the country’s political establishment,” as he claims on his web site. Most disturbingly, his lawyers are comparing him to Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former boss of the Yukos oil company and a vocal critic of the Russian government who has been languishing in prison for almost decade.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Yegiazaryan’s circumstances represent an all-too-familiar case of a businessman using his wealth to concoct a political case to avoid responsibility for his less-than-clean business dealings. In a recent piece published on the web site of Ekho Moskvyy radio, prominent Russian opposition leaders and civil society activists roundly rejected political motivation as a reason for Yegiazaryan’s criminal prosecution. Among them was Boris Nemtsov, an outspoken critic of the Kremlin who recently spent two weeks in jail for organizing an anti-government protest. “I have never heard about Yegiazaryan ever being involved in politics. ... I think he will have a very hard time proving his political refugee’s credentials,” Nemtsov said.

Yury Shmidt, a prominent human rights lawyer who represents Khodorkovsky, has expressed his incredulity at the parallels that have been drawn between the plight of his client and that of Yegiazaryan, calling them “blasphemous.”

The only remotely political connection that Yegiazaryan does have is with the pro-Kremlin, anti-U.S. LDPR, which he represented in the Duma since 1999. It is widely alleged that Duma members from the LDPR — several of whom have been implicated in or convicted of criminal dealings in the past — pay dues to the party for their seats and, therefore, immunity from prosecution, which would make Yegiazaryan one of the party’s long-time financial backers.

A number of Jewish-American groups, including the ADL, has repeatedly condemned the LDPR’s anti-Semitic message, calling on the U.S. public to boycott party members during their visits to the country. Over the years, the party has made shockingly incendiary pronouncements, which, among others, assigned Jews blame for “starting World War II,” and “provoking the Holocaust,” “masterminding 9/11,” “trafficking Russian women into foreign sex trade” and, generally, “running the world.” Undoubtedly, Yegiazaryan’s party’s anti-Semitic platform has contributed significantly to Russia’s prevailing climate of ethnic intolerance. Xenophobia is one of the main contemporary ills plaguing our societies and must not be taken lightly.

As a new American who moved to the United States from Russia, I am concerned about

unsavory characters like Yegiazaryan jumping on the bandwagon of legitimate political persecution in their country and using their ill-gotten wealth to try to fool the public and the justice system. I wonder why there still isn't, apparently, a database of persons banned from entering the United States for their xenophobic views and, if there is, why anti-Semitic bigots like Yegiazaryan are not in it.

The United States is a law-based society and even someone like Yegiazaryan should have the right to make his case, though not to buy it. The relevant judicial authority must swiftly review its merits, and as it does, I hope it will take into consideration the evidence against his being a political figure, his shady business past and his moral character.

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