Ex-Soviet States Return People to Torture in Central Asia, Amnesty Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — Amnesty International on Wednesday accused Russia, Ukraine and the five Central Asian states of colluding in abductions and unlawful transfers of asylum-seekers and refugees back to Central Asia, where they faced the risk of torture.

In a report, the London-based human rights group enumerated cases of asylum-seekers in Russia and Ukraine being spirited away from their apartments or picked up on the street and being forcibly flown back to the Central Asian state of Uzbekistan.

In a separate statement, Amnesty said that when intervention of the European Court of Human Rights obstructed the handover of individuals, "cynical subversions of international law" were used to secure the transfer.

"In the name of national security, member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States are increasingly cooperating in returning people to Central Asian countries where they

are at real risk of torture or other ill-treatment," the report said.

Abductions and attempted abductions of asylum-seekers from Central Asia by security services of ex-Soviet states — often operating on each other's territory — were occurring with such regularity that they amounted to a "region-wide extraordinary renditions program," it said.

Officials in Moscow and Tashkent were not immediately available to comment.

In Ukraine, the state migration service reacted sharply to the charges and denied that Kiev deported refugees.

"Are you asking us to justify ourselves? If they have facts, let them show these facts and we will look at them. We do not deport refugees," said Sergiy Gunko, the service's spokesman. "It is not the first time that Amnesty International is giving out information that is not quite objective."

Among cases cited in the report was that of Azamatzhon Ermakov, an Uzbek national who fled Uzbekistan to Russia in March 2009 after being charged with alleged involvement in extremist religious groups.

After his request for asylum in Russia was turned down, the European Court for Human Rights issued an order requiring Russia to stay his extradition.

He was later detained by Russian police for illegal possession of weapons — though Ermakov said police had planted a grenade on him to support a trumped-up charge.

In January, Amnesty was told that Ermakov had taken a flight back to the Uzbek capital of Tashkent after being released from detention.

"There is strong circumstantial evidence to indicate that he was abducted following his release from detention and put on a plane back to Uzbekistan," the report said.

"Twenty years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, old collegiate ties, common institutional cultures and the shared perception across the region of the threat from Islamist extremist groups bind together the successor institutions to the Soviet KGB," said John Dalhuisen, the group's Europe and Central Asia program director, in a comment issued by Amnesty.

In the past two years, the report said, authorities in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan had particularly intensified their efforts to "forcibly return members, or suspected members, of certain groups to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, notwithstanding the fact that they would face a real risk of torture."

The report also highlighted the case of Russian opposition activist Leonid Razvozzhayev, who disappeared in Kiev in October after consulting with a partner organization of the United Nations refugee agency.

He is now in Moscow, where he has been charged with planning riots. The Amnesty report said he had been abducted by Russian state security agents operating in Ukraine.