

SECTION X: DISCUSSIONS, DEBATES, HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES

The Campaign against Memorial

In accordance to the Russian law on “foreign agents” from 2012, non-governmental organisations which conduct “political activity” have to register themselves as “foreign agents” – a label that is not only perceived as a strong stigma in the Russian historical discourse, but also lays numerous administrative burdens on the organisations in question. The NGO “Memorial”, founded in 1989 to deal with the country’s Stalinist past and headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov as its first president, was forced in April 2013 by the Federal Persecution Office to register as a “foreign agent” due to its contemporary human rights work. The organisation refused and launched several court appeals, which ultimately turned out unsuccessful, when in January 2015, the High Court rejected Memorial’s appeal. The organisation still refused to stigmatise itself, resulting in the Tverskoi Court in Moscow issuing the first penalty against Memorial in December 2016, ordering it to pay 300.00 roubles for its refusal. Now, Memorial more than ever needs financial support to be able to conduct its historical and human rights related work. A group of German scholars and public figures has launched an appeal of solidarity, connected with a plea to donate.

It can be read at <http://www.solidaritaet-mit-memorial.de>.

Petrozavodsk Historian of Stalinism Arrested

In December 2016, Yuri Dmitriev was arrested in his hometown of Petrozavodsk (Karelia, Russian Federation). Dmitriev, head of the Karelian “Memorial” chapter, is a local historian who since the early 1990s made major contributions to the localisation and excavation of killing fields and mass graves of the Stalinist terror, including the mass graves of Sandarmokh and Krasnyi Bor. Furthermore, Dmitriev edited several biographical volumes on the victims of Stalinist terror in Northern Russia. Dmitriev’s court case, for which the hearings have begun in late June 2017, are based on charges that are considered absurd and trumped-up both by his supporters and the brought-in experts. It can be assumed that Dmitriev’s efforts to document the regional history of Stalin’s terror have caused discontent among the local political establishment.

Details on the case are available in the petition directed to the court and written in English, German, and Russian: <https://www.change.org/p/chairman-of-petrozavodsk-city-court-a-a-sudakov-public-appeal-in-defense-of-yuri-dmitriev>. The British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) has issued its own statement in support of Dmitriev: <http://basees.org/news/2017/7/18/basees-statement-about-the-trial-of-yuri-dmitriev>. A long report on the case and its pre-history by Tatiana Kosinova is available at <https://therussianreader.com/2017/06/03/terror-in-the-life-of-yuri-dmitriev/>.