

# Jewel of Denmark



## to Clone Christmas Tree

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## Andersen's Anniversary Inspires Events

By Angelina Davydova  
SPECIAL TO THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

With next year marking 200 years since the birth of Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, Denmark's cultural institute has announced plans to increase the number of Andersen- and Denmark-related cultural events in St. Petersburg and nationally.

Rikke Helms, the institute's director in St. Petersburg, said one Andersen-related project is already up and running, mentioning the Brodyachaya Sobaka puppet theater's production of "The Ugly Duckling," directed by Denmark's Jacques Mathiesen.

Other possible Andersen-related projects include competitions of children's drawings and cartoons, and a citywide children's carnival to include a procession on Nevsky Prospekt and theater performances in the garden of the Mikhailovsky Castle on May 28.

## OPINION

# Whatever Happens — Don't Mention The War

By Sophia Kornienko

Today in Russian-Danish relations, there is one issue that clearly and immediately attacks and divides both the Russian and the Danish minds: Chechnya.

An acute fever of mutual confrontation began when Denmark was allowed to hold the World Chechen Congress in Copenhagen in October 2002. Since then, relations have cooled to the point when last month, Putin's special representative in the EU, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, referred to Finland and Denmark as portraying Russia-phobia.

Speaking on a pro-Kremlin political show Zerkalo, Yastrzhembsky said: "Denmark has long since positioned itself against Russia. There is a whole bloc being formed, of countries attempting to seize the initiative currently in the hands of the European Union's giants" — meaning Germany, France and Italy — countries who at present remain moderately loyal to Russia.

Yastrzhembsky comments followed the November Russia-EU summit in the Hague, where after over half a year of unsuccessful attempts, the two sides once again failed to reach consensus over enhancing cooperation.

"We can only hope that the EU will make it clear to Putin that his authoritarian games are unacceptable outside of Russia, and the cancellation of Ukrainian false election results will have consequences not only for EU's relations with Ukraine, but also with Russia." Denmark's influential paper Politiken wrote on the day of the summit.

For his part, Putin indirectly accused Denmark of "encouraging terrorism". In an interview with India's daily The Hindu on December 3, he said the Russian side viewed tolerance towards Chechen separatists as back sliding into double standards. Putin described Akhmed Zakayev, a representative of Chechen leaders in exile, as "freely riding around Europe".

In fact, Zakayev visited Denmark and Norway at the start of the month to meet with Chechnya's Copenhagen-based "foreign minister" Usman Ferzauli and the Chechen Diaspora in Denmark.

The main goal was preparations for a meeting with the representatives of the Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, a Russian non-governmental organization that volunteered to act as a mediator between Russian authorities and Chechen separatist leaders in an attempt to put an end to the decade-long bloodshed.



Sophia Kornienko

also the late Akhmad Kadyrov's puppet government as "quiescent people," later took a more moderate stand. He even accepted Kadyrov's election as Chechen president and agreed to

meet his delegates in Copenhagen.

In fact, the 2002 World Chechen Congress perceived in Russia as a symbol of Denmark's support for Chechen separatists, was only allowed by official Copenhagen because Denmark, in accordance with democratic principles, has no law to ban any congresses.

Ilias Mousaev, one of the Chechens who managed to obtain a refugee status in Denmark, told the country's other large paper Berlingske Tidende, that he has only one dream: "Russians should stop the war."

"For Chechens to live in peace, Russians should completely pull out. Only then will we get real democracy," Berlingske Tidende quoted Mousaev as saying, showing a color photograph of him with a wife and two small children.

Denmark can hardly be the dream home for the growing number of Chechens seeking refuge in Northern Europe.

In Denmark right-wing parties gain votes on anti-immigrant policies to reduce the number of foreigners, including asylum seekers. The Danish Minister for Immigration and Integration, Bertel Haarder, in cooperation with the Danish People's Party, introduced some of the strictest immigration laws in the world, which sparked criticism and "profound concern" from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as France, Belgium, and Sweden.

Mona Sahlin, Sweden's minister for immigration, stated recently that the Danish policy was designed to "demonize refugees". Since February this year, Denmark is seeking to curb the activity of radical Muslims by making it harder for them to enter the country, or to stay — if they're already there. Legislation now requires clerics to prove their educational qualifications and financial self-sufficiency before they can enter the country. Those already in Denmark have to meet the same standards in order to stay.

Danes are openly compassionate regarding Chechens living in Chechnya, but remain a rather closed homogeneous society to Denmark's 170,000



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Other possible Andersen-related projects include competitions of children's drawings and cartoons, and a citywide children's carnival to include a procession on Nevsky Prospekt and theater performances in the garden of the Mikhailovsky Castle on May 28. The Danish cultural institute is negotiating with City Hall and looking for sponsors for the event.

Another important project for 2005 is the Fourth International Festival of Children's Films, two days of which the institute is planning to devote to Andersen and show Danish and Russian films based on his fairy-tales. Helms also says that the institute may hold the local premiere of three documentaries by famous Danish film director Sonja Vesterholt.

The Danish institute, along with the Danish Embassy in Moscow, also intends to participate in international film festivals in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the fall of 2005.

Danish musicians are taking part in the Arts Square Festival, St. Petersburg's top winter cultural event.

Violinist Nikolai Znaider performs at the Shostakovich Philharmonic on Dec. 30 and on Jan. 2, the Peter Schaufuss Ballet of Denmark perform modern ballet based on Andersen's tales at the Musorgsky Opera and Ballet Theater.

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The main goal was preparations for a meeting with the representatives of the Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, a Russian non-governmental organization that volunteered to act as a mediator between Russian authorities and Chechen separatist leaders in an attempt to put an end to the decade-long bloodshed.

The meeting, scheduled to take place in Brussels, and called by many, including Andrei Sakharov's widow Yelena Bonner, "possibly the last chance to bring peace to Chechnya," had to be cancelled last week. Belgian authorities refused to issue visas to the Soldiers' Mothers and claimed Zakayev would be arrested immediately upon arrival in Belgium.

The Belgian government's decision was made under pressure from Russia, Belgian delegate to the European Parliament Bart Staes told Politiken. Staes was also quoted in De Standaard and the BBC Monitoring Service as saying he found it "ridiculous to give in to Russians in this way, while other countries acted differently".

"Other countries" is, in main, Denmark, with its well-established Danish Support Committee for Chechnya in Copenhagen. Yet, hope that Chechnya can achieve peace with Denmark's help does not appear to be realistic.

Denmark's foreign affairs minister Per Stig Moller, who was once known as a harsh critic of the Kremlin, describing

separatists, was finally allowed by official Copenhagen because Denmark, in accordance with democratic principles, has no law to ban any congresses.

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Danes are openly compassionate regarding Chechens living in Chechnya, but remain a rather closed homogeneous society to Denmark's 170,000 Muslims (about three percent of the country's population). Second and third generation immigrants in Denmark are often called not Danes, even though they hold Danish passports, but "Danes of different ethnic origin".

Danish Aarhus University professor Helmuth Nyborg recently made a statement that rang around the world as he called for the government to practice selective breeding among humans to prevent the cognitive decline of the nation. Integration Minister Haarder, said Nyborg's eugenic proposals were "against all moral principles". Many Danes, however, have expressed real concerns about the future "purity of the nation".

Today, while loudly fighting over the Chechen question, how many Russians and Danes actually remember the Chechen people who are left lying as the political bone of contention?

*Sophia Kornienko is a former Staff Writer at the St. Petersburg Times. She now lives and studies in Holland.*