



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Human Rights in Russia

On the 5th Anniversary of the Nemtsov Assassination

Panel I



Melissa Hooper is a lawyer and rule of law expert as well as the Foreign Policy Advocacy Director at Human Rights First. There, Ms. Hooper provides substantive expertise on human rights developments in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, as well on rule of law and authoritarian drift within the European Union, Russian influence and disinformation, and Global Magnitsky sanctions. Prior to working with Human Rights First, Ms. Hooper was Director for Russia at the American Bar Association's Rule of Law Initiative, based in Moscow from 2011 to 2014. She has written on the export of Russia's foreign agent law, Russia's use of government-organized NGOs in disinformation and influence campaigns, and the instrumentalization of traditional values polices by Russia to exert influence in its near-abroad. She is the author of several reports and issues briefs and has extensive research and work experience in Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.



Elizabeth K. Cassidy is Director of Research and Policy at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) where she oversees USCIRF's research and publications and the development and promotion of USCIRF's policy recommendations. Her substantive expertise includes the International Religious Freedom Act, international organization issues, international and comparative law issues, and refugee and asylum policy. Ms. Cassidy lectures regularly in the United States and abroad on religious freedom and related human rights and has authored and co-authored book chapters and articles on these topics. She conducts periodic training sessions for officials from the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Justice and served on the State Department's Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group in 2014-2015. Previously, Ms. Cassidy was Assistant Executive Director of UN Watch; worked as a legal consultant to human rights NGOs in Namibia; taught at the University of Namibia, Princeton University, and Seton Hall University School of Law; practiced law and was a judicial clerk. She holds a B.A. in

international politics from Wesleyan University, a J.D. from the Washington College of Law, and a LL.M in comparative constitutional law from the University of Stellenbosch.



Daniel Balson is Advocacy Director for Europe and Central Asia for Amnesty International USA. In this capacity, he covers a region that includes Europe, Russia, Turkey, the South Caucasus, former-Soviet Central Asia, and Afghanistan and Pakistan. At Amnesty, Mr. Balson works with U.S. government representatives in Congress and the Executive Branch to ensure that human rights are prioritized and protected. Before coming to AIUSA, Mr. Balson worked at Accion International to protect microfinance clients entering the formal financial sector across Eurasia. While at Accion, he liaised with central banks, ministries of finance, and international development agencies to help reform regional financial markets. Prior to that, Mr. Balson worked at the National Democratic Institution supporting civil society and governance development across Central Asia, and as a management consultant with Springhill Consulting Group. He received his Master's in International Relations from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and his Bachelor's in Government from Cornell. He is a native Russian speaker, a fluent Spanish speaker and conversational in Hebrew and Arabic. He has published in numerous outlets.



Kate Watters is co-founder and executive director of Crude Accountability, an environmental and human rights nonprofit organization working with natural resource impacted communities in the Caspian and Black Sea regions since 2003. Ms. Watters oversees the management and development of the organization to build sustainable and effective programs and campaigns. She works closely with activists in affected communities to develop strategies and campaigns to protect environmental and human rights on the local, national, and international levels. She has worked with human rights and environmental defenders in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia since the early 1990s, has lived in and traveled extensively throughout the region, and speaks fluent Russian. She is the author of numerous reports and articles on civil society in Central Asia and the Caspian region and has been interviewed for print media, radio, and television about environment, oil and gas, and human rights. She holds an MA in Russian Area Studies from Georgetown University and a BA in Russian literature from UMass-Amherst.



Polina Sadovskaya Ph.D., joined the PEN America team in 2016 as the first Free Expression Programs coordinator for Eurasia. She came to New York from Paris, where she was with UNESCO's Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development. She organized international and global forums, and managed a project empowering local communities in Africa with radio and new digital technologies. She is an active supporter of women's and youth's rights around the world and is a member of the IFEX Council. Prior to joining PEN America, Ms. Sadovskaya worked for Habitat Pro Association, an NGO advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples in Peru. She was also a radio correspondent and a marketing and communications manager with a major bank in her native Russia. She is fluent in Russian, French, and English, and has degrees in marketing from Grenoble Graduate School of Business and in journalism from South Ural State University.