

Threatened trial of Russian 'traitor' who exposed ecological disaster on N

# Nuclear whistleblower gets KGB treatment

toria Clark  
etersburg

YANA NIKITINA'S hands  
ke as she produces a faded  
sport photograph of her  
band: a sad-eyed man with  
roopy moustache who, if  
nd guilty as charged of 'be-  
ing the Motherland by spy-  
, faces the death penalty.  
is crime is to have helped  
expose a nuclear scandal  
threatens the safety not  
of north Russia but also of  
neighbours such as Norway.  
Yana relives the dark morn-  
almost a month ago when  
men from the Federal Sec-  
Service — formerly the  
— banged at the door of  
flat in a dreary St Peters-  
suburb: 'It was 7am, so we  
still in bed. He did not  
anything with him, not  
a toothbrush or a pair of  
ers.'  
a 6ft by 6ft cell in the  
els of St Petersburg's  
ddingly ugly FSB head-  
ters, Alexander Nikitin

awaits trial and is the still cen-  
tre of a gathering international  
storm. This is not least because  
he is employed by a Norwegian  
environmental group, Bellona,  
a fact the FSB was unaware of  
when it arrested him and may  
now regret.

The international outcry has  
been swift. Amnesty Interna-  
tional has declared an 'urgent  
action' on the case, a first step



Prisoner of conscience:  
Alexander Nikitin.

to declaring Nikitin the first  
'prisoner of conscience' in  
post-Soviet Russia. The Euro-  
pean Parliament has pro-  
tested, and last week even US  
Vice-President Al Gore ex-  
pressed his concern.

Norway, of course, is out-  
raged. Its Foreign Minister,  
Bjorn Tudore Godal, arrived in  
Moscow on Friday, but was  
stood up by Deputy Prime  
Minister Oleg Soskovets, with  
whom he was hoping to raise  
the issue. 'I do not have time —  
I have to go to the Kremlin,' he  
said. Yesterday he met Foreign  
Minister Yevgeny Primakov,  
but made no further progress.

President Boris Yeltsin is due  
in Norway on a state visit later  
this month. According to  
Bellona's Hakon Strand, 'he  
can expect a massive demon-  
stration unless this is cleared  
up'.

Bellona has been investigat-  
ing the environmental threat  
posed by the nuclear activities  
of Russia's military, specifically  
the Northern Fleet.

Bellona prepared a report

last autumn showing the mili-  
tary had been piling up waste  
from submarine nuclear reac-  
tors around its naval bases at  
Western Bay on the Kola Pen-  
insula, 28 miles from the Nor-  
wegian border. It found a de-  
cline in nuclear fuel re-  
processing had resulted in a  
build-up of spent fuel stored in  
rickety and overflowing facili-  
ties on naval bases, threatening  
leaks of radioactivity.

Although Bellona has listed  
all the sources used in its  
report, the defence establish-  
ment decided its probings  
undermined Russia's security  
interests.

FSB men raided Bellona flats  
and offices in Murmansk and  
St Petersburg, interrogating 60  
people; computers and copies  
of the report were confiscated.  
And, on 6 February, they ar-  
rested Nikitin.

The affair highlights the  
growing tendency of Russia's  
defence and nuclear ministries  
to classify information as  
'secret' and to make it inacces-  
sible even to ecologists seeking



Nuclear bombshell: wast

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# ecological disaster on Norwegian border backfires on President Yeltsin

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**Nuclear bombshell: waste from submarine reactors has been piled up in the bases of Russia's Northern Fleet.**

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environment.  
'We are facing more and  
more refusals of information,'  
says Olga Razbash, deputy  
head of Ecojuris, a Moscow-  
based legal firm devoted to en-

vironmental work. 'If a man is  
fighting against pollution by a  
local factory, he is an ecologist  
— but if it involves the army or  
nuclear waste, he is not, and it  
is a small step to being called  
an "enemy of the people".'  
She cites two cases. In 1993,

the physicist Vil Mirzayanov  
was imprisoned and accused of  
betraying state secrets, after  
revealing that Russia was con-  
travening an international  
treaty by producing a binary  
nerve gas. A worldwide fuss  
about the case, the milder po-  
litical climate at the time, and  
the intervention of a liberal  
general prosecutor combined  
to win his release.

But the case of Vladimir  
Petrenko, a retired military sci-  
entist from Saratov region in  
southern Russia, has yet to be  
cleared up. When last year he  
tried to gain compensation for  
the loss of skin colour and 25  
chronic illnesses he has suf-  
fered as a result of his unwitting  
involvement in a chemical  
weapons test in 1982, the mili-  
tary authorities turned on him  
and are still trying to get him  
jailed.

Article 42 of the Russian  
Constitution, on which Nikitin  
will base his case, states that  
'everybody has a right to a  
healthy environment and  
truthful information about its  
state'. But the defence and nu-  
clear ministries enjoy the right  
to contradict that by compiling  
their own lists of 'state secrets'.

Boris Altschuler, a human  
rights activist of the Andrei Sa-  
kharov school, laments that  
'instead of the old single closed  
society we had before we now  
have lots of little closed societ-  
ies ... If they keep things  
closed they can, for example,  
rob all the money meant for  
safety provisions'.

The St Petersburg FSB was  
unavailable for comment on

the Nikitin case. 'Do you real-  
ise who you are talking to?' the  
Observer was asked by Igor  
Maksimenkov, the case officer.

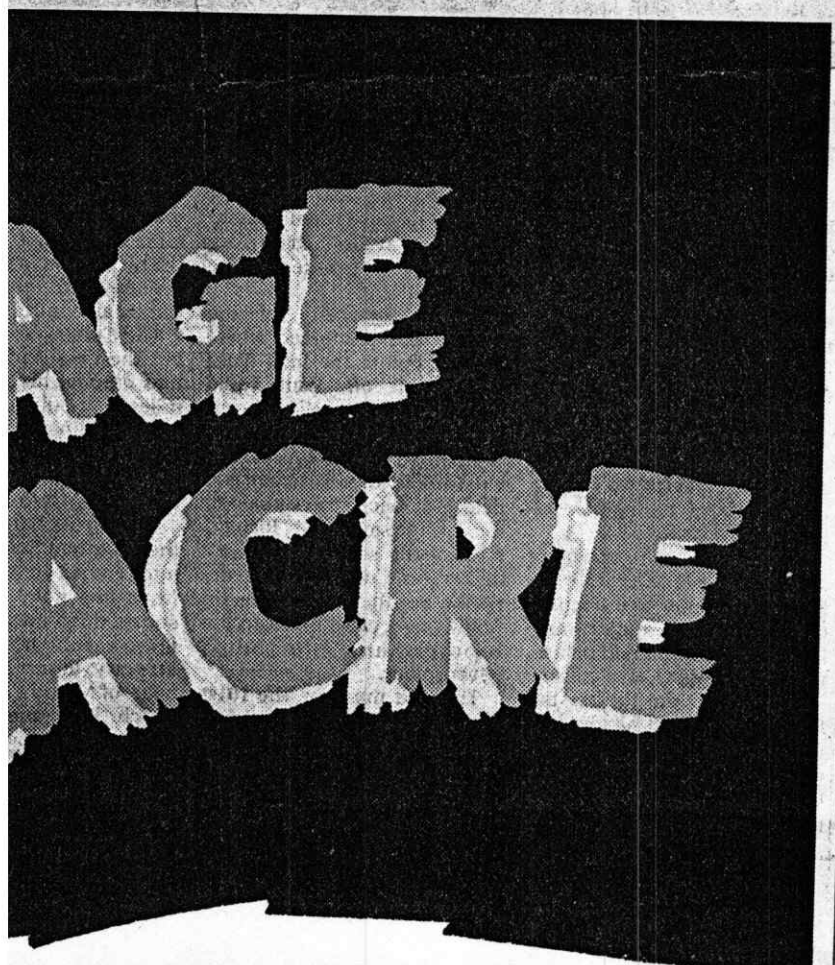
But the old KGB style may  
not work this time. Alexander  
Nikitin is raising another  
storm, in the legal world. The  
FSB has required that his law-  
yer, Yuri Schmidt, agree to  
travel restrictions, his phone  
being bugged, mail opened  
and his personal life and for-  
eign contacts being monitored.  
In a fortnight Schmidt will pro-  
test to the constitutional court  
in Moscow.

'If I lose that case, I will take  
it to the Human Rights Court in  
Strasbourg,' he says. Only last  
week Primakov was in Stras-  
bourg signing Russia into the  
Council of Europe and sub-  
scribing to the 'Convention for  
the Protection of Human  
Rights and Fundamental  
Freedoms'.

'There was everyone clap-  
ping but it was being violated  
at that moment,' says Schmidt.  
He considers Nikitin a political  
prisoner and his case espe-  
cially poignant with the tenth  
anniversary of the Chernobyl  
disaster next month.

Encouraged by the interna-  
tional support, Tatyana  
Nikitina has not despaired of  
having her husband home.  
During a first half-hour meet-  
ing with Alexander last week,  
she was also heartened by the  
impression that the FSB is wor-  
ried it has bitten off more than  
it can chew.

'I think they cannot quite  
deal with this any more,' she  
says with a hint of a smile.



**Rebveitter hits**