

**JOURNALISM AS AN ACT
OF CONSCIENCE**

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**A Collection of Articles by Winners and Finalists of the
Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience
2001-2005**

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Kostroma Publishers
Kostroma
2007

JOURNALISM AS AN ACT OF CONSCIENCE. A Collection of Articles by Winners and Finalists of the Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience, 2001-2005. Compiled by Alexei Pankin and Boris Timoshenko. Translated by Efrem Yankelevich. With a foreword by Aidan White. Edited by Rebecca Kalisher. Published by Kostroma.

Annual competition for the Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience, began in 2001. The award is presented to Russian journalists for publications that extend the life views of its authors, embodying them consistently at a high professional level and defending the values that Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov championed. Among winners of the competition are many provincial journalists, authors of interesting articles whose works are unknown to the public at large. Publication of this book makes it possible to present a panorama of contemporary Russian journalists, to reflect events that are occurring in the country and to disseminate material beyond the region in which winners of the competitions work.

The book comprises articles by twenty authors – laureates, nominees, and finalists of competitions. The authors are from the republics of Bashkortostan, Tuva, Khakasia and Chechnya; Krasnoyarsk Krai; the Perm, Novosibirsk and Kamchatka oblasts; St. Petersburg, and Moscow. The articles are devoted to pressing problems of the day: relations between ethnic groups; the authorities' impingement on individual rights; corruption and graft within the courts; problems of the Russian army; the rights of citizens and, in particular, the rights of journalists to express their opinions in the media; professional ethics of journalists.

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Journalism as an Act of Conscience

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This publication has been made possible through the organizational efforts of the Glasnost Defense Foundation and generous contributions from VinLund, a Moscow-based transportation company, and Free Voice, a Dutch foundation that supports independent media.





Andrei Sakharov Award Journalism as an Act of Conscience

The Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience, is presented to Russian journalists for material that – from the vantage point of human rights and democratic values – convincingly, honestly, and soundly poses and analyses problems of consequence for society.

To be eligible, material must be published during the term of the competition in Russian newspapers, magazines, journals, almanacs, or Internet-publications registered as mass media.

The jury for the competition, by means of voting, chooses five nominees for the award. The nominee with the greatest number of votes from members of the jury is the winner. Announcement of the laureate, nominees, and finalists is made at the annual awards ceremony.

Laureates are not eligible to receive the award a second time. Awards may be granted posthumously.

Nomination of candidates for the Andrei Sakharov Award may come from the editorial staff of newspapers and magazine and from citizens of Russia. Along with presenting the material, it is essential to append an introduction of the nominee, his or her address, and telephone. The jury reserves the right to request additional information about the candidate.

The jury will accept no more than seven (7) publications by one author for a single competition. In the annotation to the material, the nominating party must explain why this particular publication is an act of conscience.

The deadline for submission of material is November 1, inclusively. Material may be submitted in print or electronic form (diskette, compact disc, electronic mail to fond@gdf.ru). An electronic version is obligatory. Print versions of material are accepted at the following address: Glasnost Defense Foundation, Zubovsky Bulvar 4, office 432, Moscow, Russia 119902. The envelop must be marked: Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience.

The award is presented annually on Human Rights Day, **December 10**.

The following individuals took part in juries during 2001-2005:

Alexey Simonov – chairman of the jury; president, Glasnost Defense Foundation

Peter Vins – founder of the Andrei Sakharov Award

Dmitry Furman – Ph.D. history; political analyst; Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences

Inna Rudenko – columnist, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*

Otto Latsis (deceased) – publicist; winner of the Golden Pen award from the Russian Union of Journalists

Yuri Samodurov – director, the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Community Center

Alexei Pankin – independent journalist

Irina Polnikova – columnist, *Molodoi Dalnevostochnik*, Khabarovsk

Elvira Goryukhina – journalist; 2001 laureate, Andrei Sakharov Award, Novosibirsk

Anna Politkovskaya (killed murdered) – journalist; 2002 laureate, Andrei Sakharov Award

Artashes Shirikyan – publisher, *Cigar Clan Magazine*

Pilar Bonet – correspondent, newspaper *El Pais*

Mikhail Afanasyev – editor in chief, Internet publication *Novy Fokus*; 2004 laureate, Andrei Sakharov Award, Abakan

Executive Secretary – **Boris Timoshenko**, Glasnost Defense Foundation

Laureates of the competition are entitled to become members of the jury.

Awards

Laureate - \$5,000

Four nominees - \$500

Certificates are also issued to the editors, who publish the winners' material.

Additional information about the Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience, may be found at: www.gdf.ru.

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FOREWORD

Making News for Democracy

For democracy to survive and prosper we need vigilance, political belief and lashings of committed journalism. Ideally, we need the sort of reporting found in this collection of articles by some of Russia's most talented independent journalists.

This book pays tribute to the values of press freedom in a society that struggles to emerge from decades of hardship and political turmoil.

In particular, it honours the memory of Anna Politkovskaya, the campaigning journalist and human rights activist, whose brutal murder in October 2006 shocked media people everywhere.

Journalism at its best is animated, readable and stirring. It challenges old guards and nourishes the yearning of people for reliable information, presented in a way that will tickle the imagination.

But journalism can only inspire public confidence when it is actively engaged in the business of exposing corrupt and tyrannical government. Given the dangerous times in which we live, both in Russia and around the world, that is no easy assignment.

In 2006 more journalists were killed in the exercise of their profession than ever before. Many of them died, like Anna Politkovskaya, because they refused to submit to self-censorship and political intimidation.

Anna's death led to an outpouring of anger from within journalism worldwide. Across the globe media people, abandoning the notorious divisions within their profession, joined together to challenge impunity in the killing of reporters and media staff.

As this book was prepared journalists' leaders from more than 100 countries were preparing to come to Moscow for the World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists in May 2006, for a show of solidarity against impunity both in Russia and in a dozen dangerous global hot-spots.

Together journalists and media leaders are saying enough is enough. The killings have to stop. The perpetrators have to be brought to justice. The time has come, they argue, for a renewal of trust in journalism and for investment in high quality, ethical media.

This is the right moment, therefore, to highlight and celebrate the work of a generation of courageous reporters who through diligent and painstaking reporting are making news for democracy in 21st Century Russia.

This collection illustrates that for all the difficulties we face in a world of globalisation, excessive commercialisation, political propaganda and widespread cynicism, inquisitive journalism is not a lost profession.

These articles, from across the vast landscape of Russian journalism, reflect the unshakeable conviction that investigative reporting is a public interest and a core media function. It is journalism par excellence and there is no better way for the living to honour the dead.

Aidan White
General Secretary
International Federation of Journalists

Translator's Preface

This collection of articles is a sample of the many submitted by Russian journalists over five years in competitions for the Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience. The award was established in 2000 by Moscow entrepreneur Peter Vins, a former Soviet dissident and today president of VinLund, a transportation company. Glasnost Defense Foundation administers the award, which has been presented every year since 2001.

This collection is not merely about present-day Russia and the problems with which it struggles, or does not struggle, on its difficult journey to no one knows where. It is also about the journalists themselves: how they see and assess Russia's realities, to what standards they hold their government, their conceptions and misconceptions of how things are done elsewhere or should be done here, the issues and details they find important, and much, much more.

I have sought, foremost, to present to the English-speaking outsider a comprehensible version of the stories the authors tell while preserving the idiosyncrasies of their visions, attitudes, and styles. I thought it important to achieve both because, as I have said, the collection is about both: that which is beheld and the beholder.

As should be clear from my purpose, I have condensed most of the articles somewhat or edited them for clarity. Footnotes and occasional introductory remarks in italics are mine.

Efrem Yankelevich
December 18, 2006

WAR AND PEACE IN THE CAUCASUS

Galina Kovalskaya (Moscow) Der Sturm und Foolishness



Ezhenedelnyi Zhurnal (the *Weekly Journal*), January 4, 2003

A military operation to capture a large city is not a trivial event, even in modern history. We present the recollections of our columnist Galina Kovalskaya, who witnessed what happened in Grozny nine years ago.

THE combined smells of burned cloth and meat that hung over the Grozny railway station is one of my most terrible memories. At the end of December 1994, we – journalists, human rights activists, and Duma deputies – came to Chechnya to find out for ourselves what was going on in the capital. By then Grozny had been bombed several times. And while Russian generals claimed that only military targets were being bombed, the Chechens were saying that bombs were hitting residential buildings and hospitals. The First Chechen War had begun. Federal troops were steadily advancing on Grozny, but it never occurred to any of us that the troops would actually storm the city.

We were promised that President Dudaev would receive us on December 31. More than a dozen strong and huddled together, we barged into the Presidential Palace, the former regional headquarters of the Communist Party, a huge building towering over the city. Later, the city's storming would reduce it to a hollow skeleton, and still later, it would be demolished on the orders of the Russian military command.

Bearded men armed with automatic rifles – security guards and fighters from the Presidential Guard – were loitering about the palace. They were not yet called militants; this name would appear in a few hours, in the first reports on the fighting in Grozny. Most of the guardsmen had left in anticipation of massive bombardment; by some estimates, there were no more than two or three hundred of them still in the city. A few dozens were deployed in the palace. They obviously did not know how to occupy themselves. They were loitering on the stairs, chain smoking and trading jokes. We were taken to a large room and told to wait; President Dudaev would see us there as soon as he was free. The wait was several hours. Those who had been in Chechnya before counseled us not to worry – nothing in Chechnya happens on time.

Suddenly, there was a terrible noise, and then several voices cried out behind the door. The door opened and a security guard rushed in: “Everybody to the basement. There are tanks in the city.” He led us through narrow corridors and down stairs, and, as we

were walking down, the walls trembled suddenly from an artillery salvo. From then on, our decent was accompanied by the incessant sounds of artillery fire. In the basement, we discussed the situation, and everybody agreed that in a few hours the fighting would be over — Russian forces would take the palace, which would mean the end of the Chechen “independence.” As I remember, none of us was supportive of the Russian military operation being conducted under a slogan of restoring constitutional order. But Dudaev’s regime did not evoke much sympathy either.

In about two hours, an excited, breathless Chechen fighter carrying a rocket launcher entered the basement: “Want to see the tanks burn? Let’s go!” In small groups, one by one, we climbed the stairs and made our way to the palace entrance, crunching broken glass underfoot. We were not allowed to step outside but were invited to look through the doorway. Tanks were burning like torches in the square before the palace. In the confusion, it did not occur to us to count them, but they numbered a couple dozen. Chechen fighters with rocket launchers were standing on the front steps. One turned to us and said joyfully: “We destroyed all of them! We shot them down! Let them try it once more — we’ll destroy them again. We’ll fight for our freedom, all of us as one.” Another added, “The invincible Russian Army is burning!” They were happy; none noticed that we were in no hurry to share their joy.

Soon they started bringing freshly taken Russian prisoners to the basement. They brought three, then four, and then more and more, so that we lost count. The many wounded were given medical attention immediately. A Chechen surgeon worked in the basement, behind a screen, treating both the Chechen fighters and the Russian prisoners, busily removing bullets and shell fragments from their wounds. The prisoners were given water and watery soup, the same soup the Chechens were eating and feeding us. Beating POWs and cutting the throats of “contractniks”¹ would come later, when the war dragged on with no end in sight. At this time, in the euphoria of the victory and with the Moscow guests present, the Chechens wanted to be generous and humane.

The soldiers who had been captured all told the same story: They were given an order to follow the vehicle in front (either a tank or an armored personnel carrier). They moved in a single file, then the tank in the front caught fire. Before they had a chance to figure out what had happened, their tank was burning. They jumped out and were taken prisoners immediately. They did not know the city and had no maps.

A couple of days later, Zryadnyi, a captured lieutenant colonel, told Sergei Kovalev and Oleg Orlov, representatives of Memorial,² that the units’ commanders initially received

¹ Soldiers who served in the army voluntarily for pay, a distinction from regular draftees.

² A human rights organization. Sergei Kovalev, former Soviet dissident and political prisoner, served as a deputy in the State Duma and as Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Yeltsin government.

an order to remain at the outskirts of the city. General Konstantin Pulikovskiy, who was later to serve as President Putin's representative in the Far East, had held a meeting at which he assured the commanders that they would not enter the city, and that it was to be the Ministry of Internal Affairs forces who would do the job there. Within an hour after they had been deployed to the outskirts, however, the units were ordered to enter Grozny. Zryadnyi's battalion was to take the railway station district. They were not told whether they could return fire or how to disarm the adversary. Not even the commanders were issued maps of the city.

Sergei Kovalev borrowed a radio from Dudaev's guards and appealed to the Russian soldiers to give themselves up. For this, Sergei Kovalev would later be called traitor, would be denounced by Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev, and General Troshev would speak of him unfavorably in his book.³ But at that moment, all of us, including Kovalev, saw the same — our boys were burning in tanks, and they only could be saved by surrender.

Suddenly, an old Russian man from a nearby house turned up. He broke through the street fighting to the palace to tell the Chechen fighters that he needed to see the chief human rights defender Kovalev. There was a real battle going on in his house and his 70-year-old wife had become ill. There was no way he could get a doctor. He himself could not use the stairs; he had used bed sheets to climb from his second floor apartment. On the way, a shell fragment had scratched his arm. He wanted Kovalev to help him somehow, but Kovalev could offer him nothing more than sympathy. We tried to convince the old man to wait out the fighting in the basement, but he was anxious to return home. He said he was afraid to leave his wife alone for long and would chance the way back.

By evening firing around the palace had subsided somewhat, and a few of us decided to venture outside. The center of the city was littered with disabled or destroyed tanks. Two men who appeared to be ordinary civilians were walking down the street. They spotted what looked like an unharmed tank half a block away. Instead of running for cover, they continued on their way nonchalantly, expressing regrets loudly that they didn't have a grenade launcher handy. Dead bodies were lying everywhere. We did not know it then, but the dead soldiers were those from the 131st Maikop Brigade and the 81st Samara Regiment that made up the force attacking Grozny from the north. They were under the command of the same General Pulikovskiy. He had followed to the letter the General Staff plan: to advance in columns, three tanks abreast. The planners had based their tactics on the experience of capturing Baku in January 1990⁴ and did not expect

³ Gennady Troshev was supreme commander of federal forces in the North Caucasus. The book to which the author refers is *My War: Diaries of a Field Commander*, Vagruis, Moscow, 2001.

⁴ On January 19, 1990, Soviet troops entered Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, ostensibly to stop Armenian pogroms, but many believe the goal was to quash the separatist movement there.

serious resistance. On the evening of the 31st there was a news report that Grozny had been taken and that Russian soldiers were feeding Grozny residents porridge from field kitchens. But the most monstrous and incomprehensible event occurred the next day.

January 1 was a repetition of the previous day: The troops entered the city in columns again; they were allowed again into the city's center, and there they were methodically destroyed by rocket grenades. Again, as the day before, Chechens brought bewildered and confused young Russian soldiers to our basement. They were the remnants of the 131st Maikop brigade, reinforced by marines and paratroopers.

On January 2 a colleague and I ventured outside the palace. There was still gunfire in the streets. The soldiers who managed to take cover in the neighborhood houses were defending themselves fiercely against Dudaev's fighters. One of the fighters approached: "Are you journalists? I'll take you to the railway station; there are a lot of destroyed tanks there." The gigantic square before the station was packed, as far as we could see, with burning armored vehicles. From time to time, exploding ammunition made a deafening boom. A choking, revolting smell that immediately made us queasy hung over the square.

The fight for Grozny continued until the end of January. General Rokhlin assumed command of the operation and finally stopped the joy rides into the city in column formations. Instead, he advanced his forces under cover of heavy fire, killing anybody in his way. On January 19 the Russian flag first flew atop the palace – a symbol of victory over the rebellious city – but battles for the southern part of the city would go on for another two weeks.

The New Year's Eve storming of the city took the lives of about a thousand Russian soldiers; some are still counted as missing in action. Some 25,000 peaceful Grozny residents were killed.

Anna Politkovskaya (Moscow) The Budanov Case



Novaya Gazeta, May 23, 2002

OUR “patriots” can rest in peace: Colonel Budanov, whom they call a true Russian officer, is about to walk out of the courtroom of the North Caucasus Military District.¹ He will celebrate his victory over the country’s judicial system and leave for home, join his wife and children in Buryatiya, where he has not visited since February 2000. Thus the court hearings in the notorious Budanov case have come to an end, a happy end for Budanov personally and for all those who have committed, and continue to commit, war crimes in Chechnya and who justify them by war and the reciprocal cruelty of warring sides.

The colonel’s acquittal came about thanks to the two specially organized forensic medical examinations. Today we publish their findings, abridged and with our comments. Our intent is to demonstrate how a rapist, killer and kidnapper could be transformed into a courageous army colonel with a glorious combat service record.

Budanov, a colonel in the Armored (Tank) Corps who kidnapped and then strangled a Chechen girl, Elza Kungaeva, on March 26, 2000, has already undergone three forensic psychiatric evaluations. Two of them were performed soon after the event, in May and August of 2000. Both found Budanov of sound mind, well oriented and communicative, although both noted organic brain damage that caused Budanov to suffer “personality and behavior disorders.”

Neither the court nor the military brass was pleased with these findings; they meant that Budanov would have to answer fully before the law. The court requested a new evalua-

¹ Events in the case after this article was published: On July 3, 2002, Budanov was examined at the Serbsky Centre, as a result of which he was again declared not responsible (December 17, 2002). On December 31 the court ordered Budanov to undergo compulsory inpatient psychiatric treatment.

On February 28, 2003, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of Russian Federation reversed the decision of the North Caucasus District Court and ordered a retrial before a newly composed court. On July 25 Budanov was found guilty. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment and stripped of his rank. Many believe that Budanov was convicted to help Akhmad Kadyrov win Chechnya’s presidential election.

On October 6, 2003, the Military Collegium left the sentence in force. On March 29, 2004, on an appeal filed by Budanov, the Presidium of the Supreme Court confirmed the sentence.

tion, citing “vagueness, contradictory character and incompleteness of the data” and the discovery of “new and refined data” important for “determining Budanov’s true mental state.” Unlike the previous two examinations, the new evaluation was to be conducted in Moscow, by the Central Forensic Medical Laboratory of the Ministry of Defense and the Serbsky National Research Centre for Social and Forensic Psychiatry.

The court formulated its questions to the experts as follows:

1. *Is B. suffering or has he ever suffered from a chronic mental illness?*
2. *When committing the acts he is accused of, was B. in a state of temporary pathological psychiatric disorder?*
3. *Which psychological idiosyncrasies of his personality could exacerbate or influence his behavior in the situations under investigation?*
4. *When committing the acts he is accused of, was B. in an emotional state (stress, frustration, affect)?*
5. *Did Kungaeva’s actions provoke B.’s behavior?*
6. *What, in the experts’ assessment, would have been B.’s state when committing acts against Kungaeva in the living accommodations of the mobile headquarters vehicle on the night of March 26-27, 2000, in the event that:*
 - A. *Budanov believed that Kungaeva was the daughter of a female sniper, who refused to reveal her mother’s whereabouts, and Kungaeva verbally abused him. (This assertion does not correspond to fact. There is considerable testimony in prosecution files that Elza did not speak Russian. A. Politkovskaya) and tried to escape. (She did not. A.P.)*
 - B. *Kungaeva attempted to seize a loaded weapon.*
 - C. *Budanov believed Kungaeva to be the female sniper and confronted her with a photograph that exposed her as such. (No photograph was ever found, and there is only Budanov’s word that one existed. A.P.)*
7. *Was B. psychologically fit for military service, at the time of committing the acts he is accused of, and is he fit now?*

Upon which facts were the experts to base their conclusions? This is what the attorney for the victim’s relatives, Stanislav Markelov, said: “There were a number of episodes that simply did not exist for the new experts. They based their conclusions on assertions that were never proven. If they could be interpreted favorably for the colonel, the experts treated them as facts.” But let the record speak for itself.

Here are the findings of expert evaluation № 1111 concerning Colonel Budanov, born 1963, charged under article 105, part 2, paragraph c); article 126, part 3 and article

286, paragraphs a) and c) of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation. The reader will notice how everything in the period from Budanov's birth to the start of the Second Chechen War is artfully presented to create the image of a war hero.

According to B., his birth was difficult and complicated by asphyxia, requiring resuscitation. His mother and sister testified that he was a vulnerable child – if insulted he could lose his temper, respond harshly, start a fight, was especially sensitive to unjust reprimands; at the same time, he always strived to protect the weak and the poor. In 1983 B. entered the Kharkov Armored Corps Commanders School. In 1985 he married, subsequently had a son and a daughter. From 1995 to 1999, B. took correspondent courses at the Academy of the Armored Corps. He behaved commendably. In January 1995, during the first Chechen campaign, he suffered a cerebral concussion. After returning from the First Chechen War, according to his mother and sister, B.'s "disposition and character changed"; he became more nervous and irritable.

In August 1998 B. was appointed regiment commander, and in January 2000 he was given early promotion to the rank of colonel. In units subordinated to him, B. created an atmosphere of intolerance toward shortcomings and passivity. Has received government awards; twice awarded the Order of Bravery. His comrades never noticed "psychological deviations." B. had never been put under psychiatric or neurological observation. As B. testified, from the moment his regiment arrived in Chechnya from the Transbaikalia Military District on October 10, 1999, the unit was in action continuously until March 20, 2000. In October and November of 1999 he suffered cerebral concussions. Thereafter, he suffered from constant headaches. He could not bear sharp, loud sounds, became short-tempered, demonstrated unrestrained behavior, began exhibiting mood swings accompanied by outbursts of anger. B. testified that the heaviest battles were those in the Argun Gorge from December 24, 1999, to February 14, 2000. From January 12 to January 21 the regiment lost nine officers and three privates. Many of them, B. testified, died from shots in the head fired by a sniper.

On February 2, 2000, B. went to Buryatiya to visit his family on leave. According to his wife's testimony, he was irritable and nervous. He told her that his regiment had encountered Khattab's militants in the Argun Gorge. In the battle, they killed 15 of Khattab's field commanders. For that, Khattab's militants termed his regiment beastly, and they put an enormous prize on B.'s head. B. was very upset by the fact that most of his officers were killed not in battle, but by snipers. He told his wife that he would not return home until they "have finished off the last gunman." Without waiting for the end of his leave, B. returned to Chechnya on February 15.

According to testimony by Captain Kuptsov, head of the regiment's medical service, Budanov's psychiatric state took "perverted forms" as early as October of 1999 – BEFORE the death of his comrade officers and BEFORE the battles in the Argun Gorge.

Budanov's mood would change two or three times over the course of 10-15 minutes: from well disposed to rages triggered by a trifle. During periods of combat activity, this condition would worsen. In moments of rage, Budanov would throw anything within reach, including wall clocks and telephones, at people around him or on the floor.

B. took part in ground assaults and hand-to-hand combat personally. During the battles in the Argun Gorge, he repeatedly attempted to retrieve the bodies of the fallen. He blamed himself for the casualties his troops suffered at Hill 950.8. He could strike a subordinate, or throw an ashtray at him. In mid-March 2000, he threw an RGD-42 hand grenade into the stove in the officers' tent to reinforce his demand to tidy up inside the tent. Fortunately, the explosion caused no casualties, and Budanov succeeded in making the officers maintain order in the tent.

*From mid-February 2000, the regiment Budanov commanded was held as reserve for the high command and stationed near the village of Tangi. Budanov's assignment was to conduct search and reconnaissance missions, set up ambushes, check villagers' residency registrations (**Certainly not the function of the military. A.P.**) and detain suspicious-looking individuals. Budanov and his subordinates remarked that the situation was very complicated: it was difficult to tell who was friend and who was foe and where the front line began.*

*The regiment conducted search and reconnaissance missions from March 22- 24, 2000. While searching houses in Tangi, the regiment found two "slaves" who had been kidnapped 10 to 15 years earlier in Central Russia. Having received this information, B. decided on March 26 to check on the situation in Tangi personally. (**Information obtained on the 24th and decided to check on the 26th? Such questions did not bother the experts. A.P.**) He detained two Chechens and ordered them bound and put into an armored personnel carrier. When brought to the regiment's quarters, one of them produced papers identifying himself as Shamil Sambiev. (**The investigation did not succeed in finding Sambiev, but experts did not question the veracity of Budanov's words. A.P.**) Sambiev asked to talk to Budanov in private. Fifteen to 20 minutes later, B. gave an order to be taken back to Tangi, explaining that Sambiev had agreed to point out the houses where the militants' supporters lived. Driving through the village, the Chechen indicated houses of interest to them, including a white house at the southeastern end of the village where the "female sniper" lived. B. kept a photograph portraying two or three men and three or four women all holding weapons. As B. testified, he decided not to wait to detain the female sniper.*

On this day, at around 3 p.m., B. drank alcoholic beverages during lunch at the officers' canteen. Some time after 11 p.m., he decided to go to the house at 7 Zarechnaya St. The armored personnel carrier stopped by the house where the Kungaev family lived. B. entered the house accompanied by armored carrier Commander Grigoriev and Corporal Li Yen Shu. There they found Elza Kungaeva, born in 1982, and her four under-aged brothers and

sisters. B. ordered Elza Kungaeva's detention. She was wrapped in a bedspread and put into the personnel compartment of the carrier. Later she was taken to the regiment's grounds, carried into the van where B. lived and laid on the floor. Left alone with Kungaeva, B. demanded information on the routes used by the militants. When she refused, he continued to demand the information. He beat her, striking at her face and various parts of her body with his fists and feet, causing bruises to the inner part of her right thigh and her gums and the mucous membrane in her mouth. Kungaeva tried to resist, pushed him away, tried to escape from the van. B., convinced of Kungaeva's part in the illegal armed formations² and that she had had a hand in the death of his subordinates, decided to kill her. He seized Kungaeva by her clothes, threw her onto the bed and squeezed her neck until she stopped showing signs of life. Later B. called the armored carrier crew and ordered them to bury Kungaeva beyond regiment grounds. Grigoriev reported to B. on the morning of March 27 that his order had been carried out.

B. testified that he had no intentions of killing Kungaeva and sexual advances were even further from his mind. But Kungaeva "burst into curses" against the Russian armed forces and against B. personally. **(Kungaeva did not speak Russian. A.P.)** The conversation became heated. Kungaeva told him that the Chechens "would deal with him and his family." Kungaeva used obscene language to disparage him and the Russian army in general. Finally, Kungaeva attempted to leave the van, which B. did not expect, and he had to apply physical force to restrain her. During the struggle, Kungaeva's clothes were partially torn. **(Soldiers found her lying entirely naked. A.P.)** B. said that Kungaeva was exceptionally strong: she tore his T-shirt and ripped his daughter's cross from his neck. In return, he tore off her outer clothes. Kungaeva shouted that she "had not shot enough of them dead." When Kungaeva was on the van's second bed, the one furthest from the entrance, she tried to reach for B.'s handgun lying on the bedside table. B. intercepted her arm, and with his other hand close to her throat he started to press her down into the bed. Meanwhile, Kungaeva continued voicing threats against him. At the same time, before his eyes, were the faces of "every soldier and officer who died in the Argun Gorge." B. does not remember what happened next. When he came to, he saw Kungaeva lying on the bed not moving. He summoned the armored carrier crew. According to B.'s testimony, Kungaeva had her skirt on, her jackets and her bra were on the floor of the first compartment, and he had his trouser on. Li Yen Shu advised burying Kungaeva in the forest belt. B. told the crew to wrap the body in the blanket and take it away. He warned them against the customary "control shot" to the head, meaning that they should not stoop to the practices of the Chechen militants. After the crew departed, B. lay down and went to sleep.

The soldiers who guarded the commander's van that night testified repeatedly during the investigation that when Budanov called them in, he was wearing nothing but swimming trunks, and the girl lay completely naked on her back on the bed. On the floor, on

² This is Russia's official term for Chechen rebels.

the bedspread lay her clothes: panties, jacket. Budanov said, "This is to you, a Chechen bitch, for Razmakhnin, for the boys who died on that hill." Then he asked, "Who is afraid of the dead?" He lit a cigarette and ordered the soldiers to wrap the body and bury it in the forest. He warned them against saying a word to anybody, threatening that he would shoot all of them dead. He said he had enough bullets for each of them: one in the body and one for the control shot to the head.

B. reported that at around 1.30 p.m. on that day, he met with Major-General Gerasimov, acting commander of the western group of federal forces in Chechnya. (Commander Vladimir Shamanov, Budanov's longtime patron, was on leave. Otherwise, investigators from the Military Prosecutor's Office would not have been admitted to the grounds of Budanov's tank regiment. A.P.) Gerasimov accused Budanov of burning down half the village and raping a 15 year old. He spoke in an insulting manner and used obscenities. B. produced his handgun, lowered the barrel and fired toward the ground; the bullet hit his leg. Then, according to B., he and generals Gerasimov and Verbitsky went into the regiment's staff room. Later B. wrote a statement admitting his guilt.

When questioned during the preliminary investigation on October 5, 2000, B. explained that contradictions in his testimony were due to his being in a very bad state during interrogation sessions that took place on March 27, 28 and 30, 2000.

Based on the above, the commission of experts concluded that in regard to acts B. is accused of committing, he should be considered NOT RESPONSIBLE BY REASON OF INSANITY. In response to actions by Kungaeva (obscene insults, attempt to take possession of his handgun, threats), B. had developed a temporary pathological disorder of psychiatric functioning.

Response to question 5: the actions by Kungaeva, the victim, were one of the causes of B. developing the temporary psychiatric disorder.

Response to question 6: Testimony concerning B.'s alcoholic intoxication are contradictory and mutually exclusive. There are no conclusive data showing B. to have been in a state of alcoholic intoxication. (Really? Why are the data no longer conclusive? A.P.)

Response to question 7: B. is capable presently of assessing his actions. He should be subjected to psychiatric observation and treatment as an OUTPATIENT. Falls into category C, limited fitness for military service.

This is all there is to tell about the "right" expert evaluation. Its essence is: BLAME YOURSELF FOR HAVING BEEN KILLED, BECAUSE YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE RESISTED. And: WHILE KILLING, WAS INSANE; HAVING KILLED, BECAME NORMAL.

In Russia, the outcome of an expert evaluation depends not on the facts, but on who holds the pen is his hand. So, who are the people responsible for fulfilling the socio-political demand of our times and signing the cynical absolution of Budanov? Who are these unsung heroes? Here they are:

- Professor T. Pechernikova, M.D., chairman of the commission and head of the Department of Expert Evaluations, an expert psychiatrist of the highest category, 50 years of experience in expert psychiatric evaluations
- Professor F. Kondratiev, MD, head of a clinical department, 42 years of experience in expert psychiatric evaluations, Distinguished Physician of the Russian Federation
- F. Safuanov, Ph.D., Psychology, 20 years of experience in expert psychiatric evaluations
- A. Gorbatko, chief forensic psychiatric expert of the Ministry of Defense, a colonel in the Medical Corps
- G. Fastovtsev, lieutenant colonel in the Medical Corps
- G. Burnyasheva, a psychiatric expert

These are the people who did the job. They pronounced Budanov not responsible at the moment he committed the crime, but sane before and after; therefore, he is fit to continue his military service and live in society. They concluded that all that is required of him are monthly visits to a doctor.

And who was the rapist?

It has been established that on the last night of her life the poor girl was also raped. Budanov denies he raped the girl, but somebody did it. This is the unequivocal conclusion of two forensic examinations conducted during the preliminary investigation. The 124th Central Identification Laboratory of Forensic Medical conducted the first one. Here are excerpts from the laboratory report and from the minutes of the investigative examination conducted on March 28, 2000:

The burial place was in the forest belt, 950 meters from the regiment's command post. The body of a completely naked woman was discovered wrapped in a blanket. The perineum³ in the region of the genitals is stained with blood as is the corresponding portion of the blanket. Forensic medical examination of Kungaeva's body was performed on March 28, 2000, by V. Lyanenko, a captain in the Medical Corps and head of the Medical Department of the 124th laboratory. The examination was conducted on the outskirts of the Tangi-Chu village under conditions of sufficient natural lighting from 12 a.m. to 2 p.m.

³ The general region between the anus and the genital organs.

Wet, dark red stains resembling a mixture of mucus and blood are found on the genitals, on the skin of the perineum, on the back of the upper third of the thighs. The opening of the hymen is annular, 0.6 cm in diameter. There are radial, linear hemorrhaged lacerations of the hymen. Dried reddish-brown stains are found in the fold of the buttocks. The mucous membrane of the rectum is torn beginning two cm from the anus; the tear is three cm in length. The tear is filled with coagulated blood, which shows that victim was alive at the time she sustained the injury. On the blanket, on the side facing the body, there is a wet, dark-brown stain resembling blood. A stain 18×20×21 cm is located on the part of the blanket corresponding to the perineum area. The following items have been delivered together with the body: 1. A wool jacket. The back torn (cut) vertically apart. 2. A T-shirt that shows signs of having been worn. The back torn (cut) vertically apart. 3. A bra that shows signs of having been worn. The left back flap cut (torn) apart. 4. Women's underpants that show signs of having been worn. Tissue samples for forensic histology were not taken because facilities for storage and conservation are absent. Vaginal and rectal smears have been taken using gauze tampons. A blood sample has been taken using a gauze napkin. The samples and the items listed above have been transferred to the investigator.

The tearing of the hymen and rectum mucous membrane discovered on the body of Kungaeva were the result of penetration of a rigid, blunt object (or objects), such as an erect penis or the butt end of a standard-issue shovel. All the experts concluded that vaginal and rectal injuries had been sustained while Kungaeva was still alive.

Recalling that Budanov admitted the crew of the personnel carrier to his van when Kungaeva was already dead, things don't look pretty, not pretty at all. To make them prettier, the court requested a new forensic examination, so that an officer and bearer of two Orders of Bravery would not also be a rapist, at least on paper.

This is what the new, politically correct, forensic examination reported: "The tearing of the hymen and of the rectum mucous membrane was posthumous, inflicted after the contractile capabilities of live tissue had been completely lost." Somebody, of course, violated Kungaeva's body, but no, not Budanov, because he has an alibi: having killed Kungaeva he went to sleep. To erase all doubts, the signs of copious bleeding observed by forensic expert Lyanenko have become "traces of blood in the genital area that are not inconsistent with the conclusion of the posthumous character of the injuries." "Objective reasons" are found to deflect the rape charge: "The unjustified refusal of the forensic expert to take samples for forensic histological analysis makes it impossible to advance more substantiated arguments."

This is true: no histology sample was taken. There was a war out there and no place to keep the tissue samples. (This is called unjustified refusal.) It is no wonder that the war

helped a soldier escape responsibility. Pathologists agree that without histology any attempt to prove that Budanov was the rapist are doomed!

As a result, the experts reached the required conclusion easily: “There are no grounds to suggest that the posthumous injuries have been caused by an erect male sexual organ. The results of the forensic examination of the body and the material evidence do not provide grounds to conclude that a forcible sexual act against Kungaeva took place.”

THERE WAS NO RAPE. THOSE WHO THINK OTHERWISE CAN GO FLY A KITE.

And who are the heroes this time? The expert forensic commission report exonerating Budanov is signed by:

- Gedygushev, M.D., deputy director of the Russian Center for Forensic Medical Examinations of the Ministry of Health, Distinguished Physician of the Russian Federation
- Isaev, M.D., head of the Department of Complex Examinations, Russian Center for Forensic Medical Examinations of the Ministry of Health
- O. Budyakov, M.D., forensic examiner in the Department of Complex Examinations, Russian Center for Forensic Medical Examinations of the Ministry of Health, Distinguished Physician of the Russian Federation

These people sought to remove a very dirty stain from the tarnished image of the Russian Army. But history is not something that can be altered by a made-to-order forensic report. The true story of how Elza Kungaeva, a girl from the village of Tangi-Chu, died will eventually become free of politically expedient lies.

Anna Politkovskaya (Moscow) **The GRU Case That Could Not Be Hushed Up**



Novaya Gazeta, February 2002

Ten men from GRU¹ have been arrested for killing peaceful Chechens. For the first time since the war in Chechen began, thanks to the Prosecutor's Office, an event of this magnitude has not been hushed up.

ON January 11, 2002, on the road connecting the two small villages of Dai and Nokhchi-Keloy in Chechnya's Shatoy District, under a bright morning sun, ten soldiers from GRU's Special Forces unit killed and burned to ashes six people. The people were coming home to Nokhchi-Keloy in a UAZ van from the district's central town.

The military later called this arbitrary execution an "operation to capture wounded rebel leader Khattab." No report that Khattab had been captured or killed followed the "operation." Its only result has been fresh graves in three villages cemeteries and 28 orphaned children. And, of course, there is the fury, hatred, curses, emptiness...

The last photograph

"Are they children?" everyone asks when shown a photograph of the four white cocoons lying on the floor. Two of the cocoons are very small, as if of toddlers swathed in white; the other two are bigger, the size of adolescents.

The picture was taken moments before the remains were buried at the Nokhchi-Keloy cemetery. Two other cocoons were buried in the villages of Dai and Starye Atagi.

The one on the left is Zainap Dzhavatkhanova, a 40-year-old women. The mother of seven, she was expecting her eighth child. As we know today, the soldiers of the elite unit on whose training the country had spent a fortune tortured the pregnant woman, knowing that she was pregnant. And when they dragged her still alive over the snow, they knew it too. And knew it when they were killing her. And when they were burning her, they knew they were burning two.

¹ GRU, abbreviation for the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff, army intelligence.

Perhaps someone with stronger nerves could explain what kind of men they have in these special units. What these men, burnt by the war as they were, thought and felt. But I cannot. Maybe because I, too, was once pregnant.

Emotions aside, the bare fact is that what had been left of Zainap was her foot, and that is how her remains were identified – by the shoe the foot was in.

“We buried ashes,” says Larisa Shabazova, Zainap’s sister-in-law, as she tells me about the children Zainap left behind: Jabrail 15, Seda 7, the oldest is a gravely ill boy of 17 and the youngest, a girl, is just two.

“But the next one is surely a child?” people ask about the second cocoon in the picture.

But no, this is not a child either. This is what has been left of 69-year-old Said-Magomed Alaskhanov, director of the village school. He taught every one of the villagers, generation after generation. On January 11 Said-Magomed, together with his deputy Abdul-Vakhab Satabaev, was returning from a teachers’ conference in Shatoy. Shakhban Bakhaev, a forest warden, was also visiting Shatoy; he’d been summoned by the district administration. The word was that Zainap had been to Grozny to see a gynecologist and on her way back stopped to visit her relatives in Starye Atagi. Her nephew, Magomed-Emin Musaev, 22, had volunteered to accompany her home.

Magomed was the only one to resist when the *spetsnaz*² began to torture the passengers after taking them out of the van. This is probably because he was young. Already wounded, he tried to escape death, but did not get further than the steep-sloping riverbank, where they shot him dead.

This is why Magomed’s body was the only one left intact. The *spetsnaz* did not bother to go down to the riverbank, through the wet snow, to fetch it. So they did not burn Magomed, the only man in his family. What is left are his three unmarried sisters, now in a state of shock and confusion, and the old mother.

The sixth executed was Khamzat Tuburov, the van driver from the village of Dai. He was well known in the district; each day he drove local people from their villages to Shatoy and back. All that is left of Khamzat, the father of five, are a few blackened bones.

Who will help

For more than a month already, Nokhchi-Keloy is in shock. This small village of 60 homes scattered among the mountains, where life is mostly a struggle with poverty and

² special forces.

tuberculosis, has never experienced anything like it. On January 12 messengers from Dai, seven kilometers away, came to the village: “Your people have been killed on the road near us. The military towed the car with the bodies to Shatoy and left it where the park used to be. Everybody is coming to gape at it. You need to be there for identification.”

They went. Then they took the bones to Vladikavkaz, to the forensic lab of the Ministry of Health for North Ossetia. There they were told that what they had were the remains of six people, not five, as the village elders had decided going through the bones.

These, from the death certificates:

Shakhban Bakhaev, a forest warden (his cocoon on the picture is the largest, because there was more of his body left), certificate № 37-37, signed by Shamil Tauyev, a forensic expert: “CAUSE OF DEATH a) smashing of the brain tissue; b) fracture of the vault and base of the skull; c) perforating bullet wound to the skull.” This means that he had been tortured, or how else this can smashing be explained?

Zainap Dzhavatkhanova, the mother of seven, certificate № 38-38, signed by Kakhaber Tekhov, a forensic expert: “CAUSE OF DEATH a) not determined; b) charring of the body.” Meaning: burned to ashes.

A few words aside about Zainap. Both about her as a peasant woman from the mountains and as a party to the Kremlin’s intensified efforts to win immediate “return home from Georgia of the Chechen refugees.”

The Shatoy tragedy speaks louder than the propaganda of Russian officials: Zainap had been one of these refugees. She had returned to her home village of Nokhchi-Keloy just recently, having spent most of the war in Georgia with her husband and children. Did she return to die? Did she return to be burned so that her foot is all that is left of her? Would you want your sister or daughter to suffer the same fate? What would you advise the Chechen refugees who are still in Georgia?

We are standing in the yard of the poorest house in Nokhchi-Keloy. This is where the history teacher, Abdul-Vakhab Satabaev, lived. (His cocoon is on the extreme right, headless. The head was never found.) Standing with me is Baysark, his widow. His five teenage daughters do not participate in the conversation of the adults. They are inside, watching us, glued to the small window. The girls in the black kerchiefs gaze at me heavily, with scorn, as if killing me with their eyes. For them, I represent the world that manifests its existence in nothing but tragedies. They watch Baysark telling me about the funerals. She spreads her hands apart a little, as if she were holding a bowl of soup: she had little to bury, just two charred bones.

Glancing at her daughters hiding behind the window, Baysark says, "We have a custom to wrap the dead with a lot of fabric. Well, so our elders did a lot of wrapping to make it look more like a body."

Baysark weeps under disapproving sighs of the village elders, who have begun to gather in the Satabaevs' yard. A widow is not supposed to weep when speaking of her late husband.

Reminded of her duty, she gets a grip on herself and asks in a calm voice, "What am I to do? How do I get justice? Who will help?"

The-powers-that-be

Who indeed? A simple question with a seemingly simple answer – the-powers-that-be, the civil authorities, the so-called new Chechen administration.

Unfortunately, the-powers-that-be have proved worthless once again. Nobody – not Government Chairman Stanislav Ilyasov, not Head of the Republic Akhmat Kadyrov, not one of his deputies or sycophants – ever came to the Shatoy District, to Nokhchi-Keloy or Dai.

We are not even talking about financial support for the families, who cares about money. The families were waiting for condolences, for words. But no word came.

It is said that Kadyrov now dreams of having elections in Chechnya. He is running with this idea all over Moscow, lobbying the Kremlin, assuring the president that he, Kadyrov, is the man for whom the people will vote.

Sorry to disappoint him. "No. Never," the Nokhchi-Keloy villagers say. "He despises us, as he has shown. A leader who despises his people, what do we need him for?"³

A note aside. There is threatening talk from the government in Grozny, where preparations are underway for elections. They say that "some journalists" are wrong to be looking in Chechnya "only for the negative" and not noticing the lot of good the Ilyasov-Kadyrov administration is doing. I agree: "the lot of good" is hard to notice. The upbeat reports on the new prison built among the ruins of Grozny and the bountiful corn harvest are constantly overshadowed by reports of killing, torture and abuse. These latter reports come almost daily. I have more sympathy for the victims of the-powers-that-be than for Kadyrov, who is eager to become the power.

³ Kadyrov was elected president of Chechnya in October 2003. Officially, the voter turn out was 80%, he received 80% of the votes.

“But what struck us most is that the Grand Mufti of Chechnya, Shamaev, has not come either,” say the Nokhchi-Keloy village elders. “He used to be our Mufti, the Mufti of Shatoy. We were very proud to have him run for Mufti of the whole Chechnya, we did so much for him: wrote letters, went to meetings in his support....”

On January 28, having despaired of getting any attention from the authorities, the Nokhchi-Keloy villagers published an open letter to Kadyrov and Ilyasov in the newspaper *Marsho*. Here are some quotes:

“...they were cruelly abused, with making use of sophisticated torture: tearing out fingers with pliers, and their throats then were cut with a knife, the pregnant woman was violated...”

“Are the federal bandits any better than the mercenaries of the bandit armed formations?⁴ Who are our defenders? From whom are we being defended?”

“The 69-year-old director of our school and his deputy and teachers were never involved in politics. What were they guilty of?”

Today is already February 9. Has an answer come from Kadyrov or Ilyasov?

“No,” the Nokhchi-Keloy elder bowed their heads. “Not a word. And they have not sent us new teachers either.”

Now the responsibilities of the school director and his deputy have passed to the school building keeper. We are driving in the village, and he points to the cottage housing the school. “But I cannot teach,” says the keeper. “What is the use now to have the school?”

“For Nokhchi-Keloy the loss is irreplaceable,” says the head of the village administration, Mutalipp Atamirzaev. “Now there will be nobody to teach our children.”

I ask Mutalipp if any of the 28 orphans are recognized as aggrieved parties in the case. Are the children and widows receiving government assistance payments as provided by law? “No, no, and no,” answers Mutalipp. “No assistance.”

“Who are the authorities here that you can rely on?”

“Nobody. We have been forgotten. We can rely only on ourselves. Do you know what

⁴ Bandit armed formations is yet another official Russian term for Chechen rebels, and the official line is that they include mercenaries from Muslim countries.

Colonel Plotnikov shouted at the village meeting, the one who says he was in charge of the operation on January 11? He was not even ashamed to say it before the orphans and widows who were there. He yelled, ‘What is this fuss about? Some meager six bodies? I have iced 92 in Argun recently and so what? Nothing!’ He, Colonel Plotnikov, he is the authorities.”

Lastly, I talked with the villagers about the roots of the tragedy. “Why did it happen? What does the village think?”

“This was a provocation. The military doesn’t want the war to end.”

Almost a chance witness

Major Vitaly Nevmerzhitsky is the head of army intelligence for the Shatoy District military command. He believes it was not a provocation but a logical turn of events. The major, as it happened, is the principal witness in the tragedy of January 11. He is in a difficult situation; he has testified against his “mates,” as he puts it. The 29-year-old major is courageous and well educated; he understands everything, and what he understands troubles him.

“On January 11 we got a telephoned message from Khankala⁵ that 15 Arabs were evacuating wounded Khattab from Dai, that we were to take part in this cleansing operation and were to report to a Khankala representative whom we were to meet on the ground, on the road near Dai, 23 kilometers from Shatoy.

“When we arrived and I found the Khankala representative, this Colonel Plotnikov, I told him from the start that there was no wounded Khattab there, and that we were in full control of the situation, and they should fly back to Khankala. But the colonel was behaving strangely.”

“Was he drunk?”

“No, not that.... He was war crazy. Spoiling for a fight. He said he came straight from battles or maybe from cleansing operations in the Nozhai-Yurt district. It was like he was on fire. Said that in seven days he will cleanse and weed out everybody. About 3 p.m. helicopters brought ground forces, including the GRU *spetsnaz*. The main forces were put around the Upper Dai; the units guarded exit points of the village. Though we were positive there was no Khattab there, we drove to the bee yard at the little village of Zindoy. If Khattab should come, he would not show himself in the village, and nobody in the village would give him shelter.

⁵ The main army base and headquarters of the Russian forces in Chechnya.

“Leaving Dai, we saw a UAZ van near the ruins of a farm. The GRU men were checking the passengers’ papers. I noticed four Chechens and recognized one of them. I asked the officer in charge, a captain, to move the vehicle so we could pass.

“It was already around 5 p.m. when we passed this spot coming back from the bee yard. The captain jumped into the road in front of our armored carrier. The UAZ stood there sprayed with bullet holes, with nobody inside. The captain said nervously, ‘We lost contact with the senior, with Plotnikov. If you see him, tell him.’ I asked the captain if he was you having problems with the UAZ. ‘Well, kind of,’ he told me. I knew already that they had shot somebody dead.”

“What did you mean by your question ‘Are you having problems,’ ” I asked.

“Exactly what I told you: that they had shot somebody, and they did not know what to do next.”

“And what could they have done next?”

“The captain did not know how to cover their tracks, what to do with the bodies. This is what is called a problem. He asked me to explain the situation to Plotnikov. Let him make the decision. What I want to say is that from the outset no one who had flown in from Khankala had any idea of the situation in the Shatoy District. I realized immediately that they knew nothing about the situation here. Neither the colonel nor the captain. To these boys in Khankala, what I am telling them from Shatoy means nothing. I had a chat with the captain, and I realized how much fear they had put in him in Khankala: ‘Everybody in the mountains is a bandit. Topple anybody on sight. We will cover for you.’ ”

In other words, the Khankala advice was shoot anything that moves and we’ll write it off as catching bandits. Mythical bandits in this case, because the January 11 operation in the Shatoy District was undertaken based on some “field intelligence” and not confirmed by investigative measures. Incidentally, this was what the press center in Khankala distributed through the major news agencies: on January 11 six gunmen were killed in the Shatoy District.

“The captain was scared out of his wits by the Khankala fears they had put in him,” the major continued. “He was not adequately assessing the situation, and because of that he simply toppled the first people he came across. I climbed in the carrier up the road to the village and reported the situation to Plotnikov. I told him to get out of there in a hurry.”

“Why did you tell him that?”

“Because they fly in and they fly out, and we are left to clean up the mess. The longer they stay, the more mess there is to clean up. That is exactly what happened next. We stayed the night in a ruined house in Dai and at about 9 a.m. a villager came running in and said there was a car burning just outside the village, help! I put him in the armored carrier with us and we were there soon. It was the same UAZ van. I understood that the *spetsnaz* had put the bodies in the car, poured gasoline and set it on fire.”

“When did they set it on fire, in the morning?”

“No, I think they did it the around 9 p.m. on January 11. I got on the radio to our district military command and told them we needed the prosecutor sent here. There were no more individual bodies, just a heap of charred bones.”

“What is your assessment of what the captain and his men did?”

“On January 13 they took me to Dai to identify the *spetsnaz* men. I said then to the captain, ‘Got in a fix, mate?’ and he answered, ‘I sure have.’”

“What did you mean by fix?”

“It means he was carrying out an order from above and now he’s paying for it. They promised to cover for him, and they didn’t. The captain was shaking all over. I understood. He knew he had ruined his whole life. I told him I couldn’t do it any other way. I think he would not have burned the bodies, if he hadn’t been given the order.”

“You think or are you sure?”

“I am sure.”

“But however you look at it, it was he who did it. Who could have issued the order?”

“Colonel Plotnikov. But he is walking free, and the captain is under arrest.”

“Who, in your view, is to blame for this tragedy?”

“The situation we are in today is that Khankala has some 60% grasp of the real situation in Chechnya, not a full grasp. And they make their decisions accordingly.”

“To what extent are the decisions made in Khankala tragic for developments in Chechnya? I mean the tragedy of our military not being able to catch terrorist leaders, while

methodically killing off the civilian population. How tragic is the 40% that is beyond Khankala's grasp?"

"Very tragic. On January 11 we got what we had coming."

"What is to be done to avoid these tragedies in the future?"

"I pass on this one. It's clear enough."

Yes, it is clear. The major has said it all succinctly, as people with his background do. In Chechnya, there is "Khankala" and there are "field units." Khankala in quotations is not just the name of a place near Grozny where the main army base in Chechnya is located. Khankala has come to mean dozens of high-ranking officers spending their days and nights behind three concentric security perimeters amidst tons of weapons, telling each other what deadly dangers await everybody venturing outside Khankala. This scare mongering could have been dismissed as inconsequential if it were not acting as a fuse. The moment the military from Khankala, especially those with little Chechnya experience, find themselves outside Khankala, they become a depressing sight. Just like Plotnikov or the captain. "Khankala" means that one day in some Chechen district, out of the blue, big shots will descend. Without consulting officers permanently stationed in the area, they will start smashing everything around them and firing in every direction, without considering local realities.

The result is dead bodies. Unless there are new people in Khankala, the war will never end. And this war will not be against bandits. That is the main thing.

The prosecutor

In this meat grinder, is there anyone who still has a chance to stand up to Khankala?

Undoubtedly, the Prosecutor's Office; it can when it wants and is not afraid to. Insofar as the tragedy of January 11 is concerned, the hero of the operation against the "wounded Khattab" walks free and is back in Khankala. But those who have carried his orders are not.

Ten GRU *spetsnaz* have been arrested. This is unprecedented. Never in the history of the Second Chechen War has a large group from the *creme de la creme* of Russia's armed forces been arrested. They are now in the hands of the Military Prosecutor's Office. The office has opened a criminal case, charging them with murder – article 105 of the Criminal Code. Now no one can make it go away. The case files cannot simply be burned or the investigation arbitrarily stopped. As the investigation continues and

the results of forensic examination are received, the arrested are being presented with charges. The captain was the first to be charged. A lawyer from Vladikavkaz has been appointed for his defense. Everything is proceeding as it should.

Taking into account Chechen realities, however, the question of utmost importance is WHERE are the arrested exactly?

This time they are where they belong: in the jurisdiction where the crime occurred, in the stockade of the 291st Regiment quartered near the village of Barzoi, a few kilometers from Shatoy and Dai, the site of the tragedy. The building housing the Military Prosecutor's Office is also there, on the grounds of the 291st Regiment.

The fact that they are there, and not somewhere else, is the victory and accomplishment of two prosecutors – Evgeny Koba, civilian prosecutor for the Shatoy District, who opened the case, and military prosecutor Colonel Andrey Vershinin. The colonel took over the case from Koba on January 13 and did everything to keep it from being buried as has happened with many similar cases – opened, and then closed under pressure from Khankala. In today's Chechnya, in what has become the third year of the war, pursuing a criminal case against a soldier/serviceman requires courage from the prosecutor and the willingness to live everyday under a death sentence, expecting a “stray bullet” from one of your own at any moment.

Colonel Vershinin, who is in charge of the GRU case, hardly makes an impression of a tough guy. But it was he who took the decisive step in the prosecution of the case.

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, those who had been detained were sent to Khankala, because that was what Khankala wanted. As every prosecutor working in Chechnya knows, when this happens it means that the fatherly commanding officers will try by every means available, whether legal and not legal, to dispatch their criminally liable subordinates out of Khankala to Russia proper. And then good luck to anyone who would like to find them in the “limitless expanses of our motherland.” It could take years of looking. Dozens of criminal cases are waiting to be brought to conclusion, while their subjects remain at large. The usual story is that the suspect is at large; the investigation has lost steam; the prosecutor has been told to shut up...

Prosecutor Vershinin accomplished what had never been done before in this war: he made Khankala return the GRU men to the 291st Regiment, to be put under his round-the-clock supervision. This happened on February 9 while, incidentally, I was talking with the colonel in his office.

I would say that the heroic deeds of Prosecutor Vershinin match the heroism of Major

Nevmerzhitsky. However, in Chechnya today, justice seekers don't get medals and promotions, quite to the contrary.

“Do you understand how or why it happened?” was my first question to Colonel Ver-shinin.

“Yes, I do. I think about motives in this crime all the time, about who gave the order to kill.” He gives his explanation, which is no different from what Major Nevmerzhitsky told me.

“OK, what happened is what happened. People were shot dead. But why burn the bodies? The pregnant woman?”

“So far, all ten categorically deny burning the bodies. They stonewall all questions on burning. They all have one version. That they killed, but they did not burn; it was Chechen militants who did.”

“What militants? If all roads to Dai had been cut the day before, if the *spetsnaz* unit was staying ten meters from the place of execution, where did militants come from? Do you believe it?”

“No. These are exactly my questions.”

“When will this scandalous case come to court?”

“The case is solved, in general. Six killed, ten arrested, some things are still to be done. We are waiting for the official ballistics results. The biological forensic examination of the remains has to be set up. It is important to establish whether the bodies had been touched after they were shot. I think we will be ready in three to four months.”⁶

The final curtain

How do wars end? How does this war, with the horrors that torment us day after day and month after month, end?

There is not much hope, though not no hope. This is the thorn that I cannot remove: I am making my thirty-ninth field trip to Chechnya since the beginning of the Second Chechen War. From the first trip to this last, my work in Chechnya feels like being a

⁶ As of today, Captain Eduard Ulman and his men have stood two jury trials and have been acquitted in both. Recently the Supreme Court sent the case to a military court for a new trial with no jury.

member of a burial team. Bodies, funerals, killings... This is how it was in December 2001. This how it is in February 2002.

What awaits us? What awaits us if we don't stop? The fate of inmates on death row is the fate of people who entrusted the future of the country to those who are not afraid to kill innocent people.

Shatoy District, Chechnya

Maynat Abdulaeva (Grozny) Grozny Makes You Want to Stay Forever



Novaya Gazeta, January 27, 2003

If you continue to pretend that Chechnya does not exist, it will come to you eventually

I DON'T want to leave Chechnya. Chechnya makes you want to live there. To rise with the dawn, to busy yourself around the house, and to have a house. Whether to rejoice or to weep, to love or to hate, if I am to bring up a child, I want it here, in this place, where everything balances on the line between life and death. Nowhere else in the world is that line as shifting and uncertain.

News brought to you by Ichkeria TV

A convoy of federal troops is winding along a rutted road. There are several armored personnel carriers, Ural trucks. Sappers holding mine detectors cover the sides of the road. There are soldiers on foot. From time to time, they crouch into firing position. In the background are roofs of houses and their smoking chimneys.

Suddenly come cries of “Allah Akbar!” The camera trembles slightly. One of the armored carriers blows up, and several soldiers somersault cinematographically into the air. But it is not, as it first appeared, one of the many Russian action movies about Chechnya. The scene is accompanied by a popular Chechen song, “Paradise under a Canopy of Swords,” and followed by documentary clips: wounded and dead children, dead Khattab with his chin tied up, Grozny in ruins, diving attack planes.

While tuning my small battery-powered television set, I stumble from time to time onto broadcasts of official Chechen television. During the First Chechen War, in contrast, Ichkeria TV would occasionally even blot out the powerful federal television channel signals, and an interview with Dudaev¹ would suddenly replace a Moscow talk show. Now to watch news on Ichkeria TV one has to learn how to tune in.

Or take the newspaper *Ichkeria*. You go down to the hall in the morning and there it is — a pile of freshly printed copies, as if materializing out of thin air. The latest issue is about Mikhail Babich and the criminal chapters in his biography.²

¹ The first president of Chechnya. He was killed in April 1996, presumably by a Russian rocket.

² Appointed prime minister of Chechnya by Moscow. As vice-president of a state company that distributed Western food aid, Babich was the subject of a criminal investigation for allegedly selling the food to commercial firms. He is currently a delegate in the State Duma representing the pro-Kremlin United Russia party.

Afterlife or Ingushetia

The controversy around Chechen refugees in Ingushetia will not subside. The refugees are reluctant to return to the ruins of their old life. Meanwhile, Chechen officials hint that by remaining in Ingushetia, they play into the hands of the militants who allegedly pay the refugees to stay there.

I think it is rubbish. Graffiti on the walls in Grozny, for example, testify to the contrary. “Afterlife is better than Ingushetia,” says one and another concurs: “End of absurd is better than absurd without end.” And another: “Revenge is sweeter than humanitarian aid.”

In the beginning of December, an acquaintance of mine, one of the best computer experts in city, returned to Grozny from Ingushetia. He opened a business with computer classes, video rental and copying and laminating services. Two weeks later he was “cleansed.” Although not completely – he was not even shot. One day armed people in military uniforms simply came in a UAZ van, took the copying machine and two computers, and left with a polite goodbye. The computer expert took his family and fled, not to Ingushetia but much further, to Barnaul.³

Market of contention

Grozny was recently shaken by something momentous. In one night, city authorities bulldozed the notorious central city market flat.

The pretext was that the market detracted from the appearance of the city’s historic center and did not satisfy public hygiene norms. For those who have not seen it, the historic center of the city is a heap of stinking ruins.⁴ As to sanitary norms, what does satisfy them in Chechnya?

As usual, the real reason for demolishing the pitiful shacks was different from that declared. The real reason is an open secret in Grozny. A mall has been built in Theater Square, a tidy building apparently corresponding to those sanitary norms, even attractive in some ways if one ignores its absurdly painted blue walls. The mall is the property, a persistent rumor has it, of Beslan Gantamirov, Grozny’s mayor.

In today’s Grozny, where rats enjoy some more rights than people (unlike people, they can walk the streets freely 24 hours a day), it would be preposterous to believe that the

³ City in southwestern Siberia.

⁴ Grozny was partially destroyed during the First Chechen War. Most of what remained was bombed to the ground at the beginning of the Second Chechen War, in late 1999-early 2000.

market's demolition was motivated by concern for the cleanliness of streets. More likely, somebody (and we can guess who) was after the money that circulated there in large amounts, because government retail is absent completely. And that somebody decided to put a roof over it, literally and figuratively.⁵

Outdoor facilities

Speaking of sanitary norms, most of the few apartment buildings in Grozny that have been restored do not have toilets. More precisely, the broken inner workings of toilets have been replaced, but toilets cannot be used because the sewer system does not function. Construction workers devised a solution: in the courtyard of each apartment building, they dig a hole in the ground and put a shed over it. So, the president's dream to "waste them in the outhouse" is easier to realize.⁶

The heating situation is no less absurd. Hot water radiators are being installed in the apartments. A lot of work is involved in the measuring, cutting, welding. But the radiators are no more than theater props; there is no central heating in Grozny. The empty, freshly painted radiators just stand there. Perhaps they beatify the apartments; perhaps it is a joke.

Radiators aside, life in Chechnya is full of excitement and Grozny, in particular, is a paradise for connoisseurs of extreme lifestyle.

Going to bed? Put your cot in a place where you are less likely to be dusted by fragment, should they fly through the window. Waking at night, you hear the sounds of armored vehicles in the streets, and you wonder whose house will they stop at. This is more of an adrenaline rush than you can buy on any roller coaster.

So, friends, come to live in Chechnya! Or continue to pretend silently that there is no such place. That way, one day, maybe it will come to you.

⁵ Roof has acquired a new meaning in Russia: a band of racketeers, police, FSB, local administration, etc. providing protection from competitors and other services to a business for pay. The question, who is their roof? or who roofs them? are asked routinely, though not necessarily answered.

⁶ A reference to Putin's famous promise, made in September 1999 shortly before being elected president of the Russian Federation, to "waste terrorists in the outhouse."

Natalya Chernova (Moscow) A Visit to the Capital



Novaya Gazeta, May 19, 2003

IN March we published Natalya Sheveleva's article, "Ask for Alikhan," about Alikhan Akhilgov who brings children from refugee camps in Ingushetia to Moscow. He finds Moscow families willing to host a child for a month or two or three – to give them warmth, feed them up and see to their health problems. The Chernov family is one of the families Akhilgov found. For two months, Natalya Chernova kept a diary of life with 11-year-old Aslan, a boy from Grozny.

Day 1

He was silent all the way from the railroad station. If I asked him a question he would just nod. I asked him, "Do you understand Russian well." He nodded silently. When we got home, he sat himself on a chair in the kitchen. He would not look up, he did not want to wash or to eat.

The only solution was marshal law: Orders are carried out, not discussed. He picked up the change in the tone immediately. Still, stopping in the bathroom doors he muttered, "I'm not going to take off my hat." And I agreed, "You can bathe with your hat on." Soon I heard the whirl of a wind-up toy boat. This is much better – there is a child in him.

At 11 years, Aslan looks no older than 8. He is short, weighs probably 30 kilos and something, but his lean back is straight. First thing is to fatten him up a bit, and then we'll see.

During the whole day, he uttered just a few sentences: "I'll sleep here tonight, but tomorrow send me back. Can't tomorrow? Then in a week. And don't send me to school." I ask him why. "Are there any Chechens?" he asks after a long silence. I tell him I don't know. "Don't send me to school. Russians don't like us."

On the evening news, they show a *spetsnaz* detachment performing demonstration exercises before being sent to Chechnya. My four-year-old, Dima, asks, "Are they ours?" Aslan is silent. I give a noncommittal answer, saying that they are federal troops. Dima is not satisfied: "Are they good guys or bad guys?" I tell them that anybody shooting at people is bad.

Day 2

Leaving home in the morning, I show Aslan how to open the door and how to use the lift. “Why are you telling me that? I’m not going out by myself.”

“Are you afraid?”

“I’m not afraid. Just not going out.”

We go to the market together. The powdery snow on the streets excites him. We stop by a mountain ash, and he asks why no one has picked the berries. I want to get him some, but they are beyond my reach.

Suddenly he asks why Russian women smoke. “Well, women may also have bad habits, some even drink.” He agrees: they do drink and he knows it. “We used to have a Russian woman living in our building. When her mother died, she bought a case of vodka and invited guests to celebrate.” Biting back laughter, I explain that this is a Christian custom called wake: they don’t celebrate death, they grieve together.

Planning an outing to Red Square next weekend. “Is it where the mausoleum is? Have you seen Lenin?”

“I have. Not much to look at.”

“Better to bury him.”

I have to go to a gym class this evening. All of a sudden he becomes tense and says he is not going anywhere in the night. I explain to him over and over again, twenty times in a row, that it is not night yet. He is accustomed to a life that stops at 6 p.m., when curfew begins.

Before starting to eat, he cuts himself three huge slices of bread and spreads them thickly with ketchup. “Have I seen you before?”

“No, Aslan, you haven’t.”

“Have you seen me?”

“No, I haven’t seen you either.”

Day 3

For forty minutes, he sits by the washing machine and watches it spin. They used to have a washing machine in Grozny. The war started again, and they had nothing to eat,

so they took it apart and sold it for scrap. Copper from the motor went for 20 rubles a kilo. “When I grow up, I will buy my mom everything she wants,” Aslan says.

He spends half an hour playing with a shop’s automatic door, training it to open and close. He asks how the traffic light works and which light means what. He suggests we cross on red. Once, in Grozny, he was running across the street. To avoid being hit by a bus he threw himself into a rut in the dirt road. The bus passed over him without a scratch. After that incident, every evening at the same time he would lay himself in the rut to wait for the bus. He has no self-preservation instinct. For him, danger is a part of life.

I went to check on him during the night. He woke and sprung up: “Am I a Chechen or a Russian?”

“A Chechen. Go to sleep.”

Day 4

A hitch – can’t find sausage without pork in it. Something more serious – confessed he sometimes spits blood. We went to an outpatient clinic. His TB skin test came out positive. On Tuesday will be going to the TB clinic. Today, for the first time, he ventured outside by himself. He went sledding down the ice run in the yard with the neighborhood kids,. Enthusiastically tried every swing on the playground.

We are watching television together. Pointing at Vladimir Putin, he asks, “Is he the president of the whole world?” God have mercy on us, no. I explain that each country has its own president. He wants to make sure, “Is he the president in Nalchick¹ too?” He rejects, nevertheless, Putin’s presidency in Chechnya, “because our president was killed.”²

When he thinks nobody can see him, he runs to the phone and tries to make calls. He has never used a phone, and does not know how to use it. Now we are learning to dial and to speak over it. The time is a half an hour to midnight. My husband and Aslan are sitting in the kitchen. At Aslan’s request, he is explaining to him why Russia is fighting Chechnya.

Day 7

Aslan concluded that Russia and Chechnya should unite for war with America. He picked up the straightforward idea that America is enemy number one from the news program *Vesti*.

¹ Nalchick, the capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, a Chechnya neighbor.

² Dzhokhar Dudaev, first president of Chechnya, killed on April 21, 1996, by two laser-guided missiles while speaking on a satellite phone. It is believed that his location was detected by a Russian reconnaissance aircraft. Chechnya’s next elected president, Aslan Maskhadov, was killed by Russian special forces on March 8, 2005, during an attack on his underground headquarters.

My fight against television takes on the scale of a campaign. Aslan can be torn away from the dumb box only by force. Creators of the programs he watches – *Windows*, *Maiden's Tears*, criminal serials – ought to be lynched. His most innocuous passion is soccer. If none of the above is on to numb his mind, he consoles himself with cartoons.

Day 8

Today we went to the TB clinic. While we were waiting for the results, he asked me at least twenty times what fluorography is and whether we could take the photograph home. The red alert is off! There is nothing in his lungs but scars from pneumonia.

Though I have made a point of never asking him anything, he sometimes volunteers everyday stories from his life back home. "Papa was taking copper to sell in his car. Soldiers stopped him and beat him on the back with rifle butts. They broke his spine."

"Soldiers came through our balcony to get into the neighbor's apartment. They thought the neighbors were hiding dollars there. They found nothing and threw a grenade in. All the glass in our windows flew out."

"I was collecting the empties, saved 200 rubles and bought some gasoline for my father. He let me drive twice around the house." (His father receives a disability pension, because of the damaged spine, and supplements it by driving taxi in his old car.)

During the entire week, Aslan lost his fighting spirit only once. When Dasha went into a hopeless fuss to shut down the television, Aslan left abruptly, locked himself in his room and started to cry. It turned out he was offended by Dasha raising her voice at him (and I understand her perfectly well). Aslan (and I understand him perfectly well) wouldn't suffer it from anybody but his mother, and perhaps me under current circumstances.

Aslan asked to go to the circus. He does not know what a circus is, but he believes that it is "pretty." Pretty is almost the only adjective he uses. Asks why I wash my hands so often and eat so little bread.

Day 9

Today I sent Aslan to school for the first time. I waited anxiously for his return. It turned out he refused to join his class. Dasha took him to her own, 9B, and got permission from the understanding teacher to let him stay there for a while. Still, he had to endure an hour with his own class, 6E. He spent the hour with his hands over his face.

Two Chechen boys from the 11th grade told him during a break to just let know who he is having problems with, if there were any.

He tried to convince me that it is not possible to go to the school where there are so few Chechens. My reply, that only girls have the right to be afraid of difficulties, knocked him down. Tomorrow we will make another try.

Day 10

Today is February 23.³ In the evening we watched a fireworks display from our 18th floor. Aslan was dumbstruck. He tried to figure out what kind of shells they were firing. The idea that shells could create beauty is incomprehensible to him.

He came across an advertisement for the musical *Nord-Ost* and after studying it he said, “This Baraev is a fool. Did he want to get all of us Chechens shot?”⁴

Day 11

Several school days have passed without incident. Aslan has established contact with the other kids, which means that they let him crib from them. His academic skills are full of gaps: almost zero English, neglected mathematics. Dasha hammered fractions into him for two hours, while Aslan diligently tried to follow.

Aslan brought home a foolish leaflet of some promotional competition. He began explaining that if he writes “pretty” about how he deals with his problems, he’ll get a prize. I asked him what problems he has. He fell silent, deep in thought. Then he asked me if I could help him invent some.

We went to Bitsev Park, sledded down ice runs. Aslan was as excited as a puppy, but tried hard to conceal it. He liked the ice sled very much. It’s kind of a plastic bowl with handles; you sit in and hurtle downhill.

Aslan again had a conflict with Dasha, who, this time, forbade him to eat an icicle. The bottom line – Dasha slammed the door and said she is treated like a nobody around here. Peace was restored when Dasha presented Aslan with a personal bottle of bath foam.

³ A national holiday inherited from Soviet times, once Red Army Day. Today it is Defenders of the Fatherland Day.

⁴ Movsar Baraev, the leader of a group of Chechens. In October 2002, during a performance of the musical *Nord-Ost*, they took everyone inside the Moscow theater hostage. According to official, still-disputed figures, all the terrorists and 129 hostages died as a result of rescue operations. Most of the hostages died from poisoning from the sleeping gas used during the operation.

Aslan's relationship with Dima is more harmonious. Sometimes he starts to order the youngest around. Dima reverses the score by responding with a deafening cry.

Day 12

We were drinking tea in the kitchen. Aslan began his lamentations about school again: too few Chechens. He is extremely good, even enthusiastic, about inventing excuses for not going to school and finding ways to skip it. He confesses he did not like going to school back home either.

“What about back home, did you have any Russian friends there?”

“No... Yes, there were some. Russian soldiers – they used to come to our backyard to barbeque shashlik. Once they gave me some. They told me to let them know if anybody bothers me. They still come sometimes. I gather wood for them with the other kids from the neighborhood. They give us anchovy tins for the wood. This big! I even had my picture taken with them. I hid the picture, though. My Mom would get angry at me.”

Aslan is fond of telling absurd, brutish stories, like the one about a woman who lost her eye in an explosion – and then played soccer with her own eyeball. He likes to lie on the floor by the tape recorder listening for hours to the fairy tales Dima outgrew long ago.

Day 14

In the subway we came upon a gruesome sight: the body of an old man on the floor surrounded by police and medics. Aslan was twisting his neck to get a better look. I was pulling him away by his arm – as if he is too young to see such things, as if he has not seen horrors worse than my worst nightmares.

Suddenly he burst. For forty minutes, barely pausing to catch his breath, he told me how “the soldiers came and killed my friend, he was fourteen. My cousin, he was coming home from the university, was stopped in the street. They struck him with a rifle butt and took his money. A guy from the house next door, he went out in the night and got his legs sprayed by automatic fire. Then people in masks came to where he lived and killed him.” His stories are not without embellishment. His friend fights back to the last bullet.

Back home, in the evening, he reported, “We saw a man who was killed in the subway.” For Aslan, dead means killed.

Day 15

Aslan's got the blues. He was on the phone with Grozny and became anxious to go home. "You are not happy here?"

"I am. I just want to be with Mom."

Aslan came home from school and proudly told us the story of how he got a free lunch. It turned out that free lunch is provided for younger school-children from low-income families. Aslan said that he was from the third grade – he could pass for a first grader considering he weights just 32 kilos. That, and his earnest looks, earned him two frankfurters and some mashed potatoes.

While I was away, he got into a fight with Dasha again. He is inherently unable to obey women, and Dasha categorically refuses to dance around an 11-years-old kid to make him wash his hands and drink only boiled water. "Of course, all Chechens are bad, all Russians are good," Aslan concluded indignantly. "Yes. All the Chechens who don't wash their hands are bad," retorted Dasha.

Day 16

I never ask him about the war; it feels unnatural to talk about it with a child. But today he started it on his own.

"We have a good apartment. It has three rooms. When we had the second war, it was not even touched. No, we didn't stay in Grozny for the war. We went to my grandmother's in the country. Mom's sister and brother stayed in our apartment, because it was safer in our district. But then they started shooting there, too, and they went back to their place, just for a while, to wait out the shooting and to pick up their papers. While they were there, a shell flew in through their window. My uncle got buried under a collapsed wall and my aunt got cut by fragments. They were all covered with blood. Then they put some of their things in a wheelbarrow and started on foot to Grandma's place in the village. It's 70 kilometers away. They passed two roadblocks, but were stopped at the third and asked for their papers. My aunt promised her relatives would fetch the papers, while she waits at the roadblock. My father went from the village to their apartment and looked for five days for the bag with the papers. He went through all the rubble with his bare hands and found it at the end."

Day 17

Today we went to Red Square. On Vasilievsky Spusk they were celebrating Maslenitza or Pancake Week.⁵ There were many delightful treats: blini, tea, attractions, air balloons. All three of us – Aslan, Dasha and I – gave ourselves up to gorging on street fare and aimless loitering. The day was filled with spring brightness, but Aslan kept his eyes on the pavement. “Aslan, up with your head, look around,” I told him.

“Why? I have seen it all already.”

Inside the Kremlin, the Tsar Cannon and Tsar Bell impressed Aslan from only the most practical perspective, “Wow, if I could sell it for scrap, I would get a lot of money.” In the church, I had to whisper to him for three minutes to make him remove his hat. We almost got into a fight over it. He asked why Christ looks the same on every icon if nobody has ever seen him. We stopped before an old, darkened icon of a saint with non-Slavic features. “Is it Pushkin?”

Day 18

On the way home from school, Aslan again kept his eyes on the pavement. I admonished him automatically, and then it occurred to me to ask if he’d seen mines? “Yeah.” For a half an hour I was given a lecture on tripwires, mines and TNT. “See this house? It takes a kilo of TNT to blow it up. A matchbox of TNT is enough to blow up this car. Once, I almost got caught by a tripwire. They are not really very dangerous; they only explode if pulled hard. But that time I almost did it, caught my foot on the wire and started falling, almost pulled off the detonator. My friend pushed me aside just in time. I have a hand grenade at home, and I am going to explode it on my birthday; I did it on my last birthday, too. There is an old house at the end of the street where I live. Nobody lives there. We threw a grenade inside; it was pretty. Me and my friends, we have a cartridge belt, two flares, three mines and an Uzi. When my friends move to Dagestan, they’ll leave it to me. I’m gonna hide the Uzi and sell the mines to soldiers. They gave me 250 rubles⁶ for a hand grenade.”

He told me all this with a voice full of superiority. When we were approaching the market, he shouted a sudden warning. I jumped to his side, but he just laughed, “Look where you put your feet!”

⁵ The last week before Great Lent.

⁶ About one dollar.

Day 19

Aslan has a vague image of the world divided by continents and countries. He knows there are Russia, America and Chechnya. He has little grasp of the world around him. “Have any of your friends ever lived in refugee camps?”

“What is that?”

“You don’t know who refugees are?”

“No.”

He is not interested in the world at large, apart from his desire to meet a live Negro. His dream is to become a banker.

Day 21

I decided to take Aslan to a museum. He is reluctant, “There is nothing interesting in museums.” The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, he rejected from the outset, “I don’t like pictures, especially those by Pushkin.”

We agreed on the Polytechnical Museum, but arrived too late. As a consolation, I bought us ice cream. In the best tradition of Grozny’s markets, Aslan asked the vendor if she would come down on the price.

The whole evening he droned on about how studying is unnecessary; the reason was his F in biology. I almost resorted to force to get him to open the textbook. In the process, he got a lecture on how academic skills influence one’s fate. How can I make him understand that without education there is no escaping the fate programmed by his present circumstances?

Day 22

Hooray! He got an A in biology. The period of decadence is over! From his favorite monologue on how Grozny is the only place to live, he has switched to musings on how lucky the Muscovites are to live in this city. His positive attitude has been reinforced by pancakes with sweetened condensed milk. He asked whether he could buy an apartment in Moscow when he grows up.

Went to the store by himself. The cashier, as usual, got agitated when Aslan did something out of order: “What is this? Never been here before?” Aslan explained to the woman that this is his first time in Moscow. “Where are you from?” When he told her from Grozny, the woman proved up to the occasion, “Come back soon and as often as you want.”

Day 23

Aslan did not escape the Pushkin Museum forever. The world treasury of art took about 40 minutes to conquer. Aslan's questions and comments: On Antiquity, "Why are all these people naked?" On Flemish painters, "These are pretty pictures, not like you have at home." On Matisse, "This man hasn't learned to paint at all." He again displayed an unhealthy interest in iron, particularly in a knight in armor.

On the way back, we stopped by the church of Christ the Savior. It took some convincing to make Aslan go inside, since "we've seen it all in the Kremlin." He was impressed by the see-through charity box full of bills. He voiced doubts as to whether the money would really be spent for godly purposes. My assurances probably lacked conviction.

In the subway's long passage, Aslan suddenly wiggled out of my hand and started to run. I barely managed to catch him by the collar. When I lifted my eyes, I discovered five men in fatigues coming our way. Aslan shrunk and remained silent for a long time.

Day 25

I had to leave the boys in the care of a nanny for a few hours. Valya, a woman with a big heart, adores every child given into her care. However, when she learned where Aslan is from, she began insisting that a person should live in his own city. What you hear in any Moscow market is a much stronger expression of this idea, but I did not expect it from Valya. It was even more distressing to hear Aslan say, "You know, your Valya is right. A person should live in his own city."

He shut himself up in his room with Dima. Soon I heard him singing a patriotic pop song, "Officers, Officers, Guns are Aimed at Your Heart."

Day 27

We put in an appearance at the St. Patrick's Day parade that, curiously, has become a Russian folk festival. Make-believe Irishmen and their sympathizers rolled down the Arbat hooting. Aslan stopped and gaped until the street cleared. To top it all, his dream came true – he came face to face with a "live Negro."

"They let balloons fly into the sky. I wonder what the birds thought they were."

Day 30

I tried again to tear him from the TV set, arguing that sleep is essential for a growing child. Aslan put up stiff resistance. At home he never goes to bed be-

fore one, because he cannot sleep anyway. “But my father, he can sleep so well he does not even wake up when soldiers come.”

“Aslan! What soldiers? At night?”

“Russian soldiers. They come every week to check on the house, at about three in the night. They put on lights in every room and look who is in the house. Last time they took cartridges from my playstation. No, they never took Papa away, they knew already that he is an invalid. It is only my sister who gets scared to death and cries every time they come.”

Day 33

I no longer feel an urge to write something every day, which is perhaps a sign that Aslan has adapted to our way of life. I consider it a personal achievement that Aslan now says thank you, washes his hands, drinks boiled water (most of the time) and washes his socks every evening.

The gender problem, however, remains unresolved. He cannot accept Dasha as out-ranking him in seniority; therefore, he rejects all her demands, even the reasonable ones. This evening, the conflict peaked. I went to bed. Aslan stayed up to watch soccer. And Dasha went to her room to do homework. At about midnight, the conflicting parties entered my room in search of justice. One claimed the right to receive information and the other, the right to rest. I delivered my judgment in the way that realized my right to shout, which worked. Later, I sat in the kitchen expecting a sleepless night, listening to sobbing coming from Aslan’s and Dasha’s rooms.

Day 34

This morning, Dasha called from the school: “Come quickly, it seems like Aslan broke his leg.” I found Aslan in the schoolyard throwing snowballs, with one leg in the air. In the infirmary, they told us there is no fracture, but that he needs sea salt baths for his leg. Aslan was delighted; his leg never got so much care.

In the evening, we watched news on the start of war in Iraq; we watched every news program in turn. Aslan asked if there was ever a war before in Iraq. “Somebody told me that there will be no more war in Chechnya after this one. Right?”

“Of course, Aslan.”

“When this war is over, they will build new houses in Grozny. It will be pretty. Will you come then?” I nodded. Then the boys sat down to draw. Dima drew the cave of an evil-doer, and Aslan drew the Chechen flag.

Day 36

Aslan came home from school and fumbled in his schoolbag for a long time. Finally, he produced a paper flower he made from a notebook page especially for me and put it in a vase on the refrigerator.

The war in Iraq is again on the news. Aslan comments: “They should fight where there are no people, in the desert, just one army against another. You see, they bomb cities and common people get hit. If they made me fight, and I did not want to, I would shoot at my commanders.”

“Aslan, soldiers just follow orders; they are not allowed to decide whether the orders are just or not.”

“Still, I would shoot.”

Aslan has a curious attitude toward life and death. On one hand, he sincerely feels pity for a tree with a broken branch: “It is the same as breaking off the tree’s arm!” On the other hand, he is completely emotionless, at least outwardly, when it comes to death and injuries suffered by the people he knows. Is this a defensive reaction?

Day 37

Another foray into the world of culture. This time the Polytechnic Museum was the victim. Aslan managed to touch everything within reach, despite my lecturing him on museum rules. The only restraining influence was the cry of an old lady, a custodian, who awoke suddenly just as Aslan was about to enter the space station Mir. Thank God, glass panels protected the space food tubes.

Anything that takes mental effort bores Aslan. The exhibits that required more than 30 seconds to figure out left no impression. He is attracted by spectacles most of all, spectacles of any kind. He was glued to a microscope in the museum – spent 20 minutes watching bacteria thrash about under the glass.

In the evening, I was passing by the boys’ room and saw them standing by the window, their noses pressed against the glass. “Dima, do you like living in Moscow?”

“I like it, and you?”

“I like it a little bit, but Chechnya is prettier.”

Day 38

The circus turned him quietly ecstatic and thoughtful. He was so impressed that he even stopped arguing with Dasha for a while. He did, however, suggest to her that the pythons were inflated rubber and the bear who juggled a pole was actually a man in disguise. Perhaps he needed to lower the emotional impact of the show. Of the tiger trainer, Aslan said, “He is a very kind man, because he keeps tigers in his own apartment. It must be very inconvenient for him.” To add to the excitement, Aslan got to pet a camel. The camel’s owner would not allow it, but Aslan managed to pet the camel surreptitiously, on the knee. “He stinks,” Aslan commented with undeniable satisfaction.

Day 39

Aslan’s aunt called from Grozny. After talking, he cheerfully announced that he would be going home in two weeks. “I would have stayed with you, but I want to see my Mom. I wish I could go there for a while and then come back. I’ll write you letters, a hundred letters. Could you read a hundred letters? I’ll send you a picture of my sister. Do you think a puzzle for Dima would fit into an envelope?”

For God’s sake, why should he go to this damn Grozny? What is there for him?

We went to a barber, and Aslan decided on the style of his haircut. He left the barber-shop looking proud, radiant and pretty funny. Generally, Aslan is not satisfied with his looks. He is not happy with the slight curliness of his hair or that he has a cross-eye that shows sometimes. He told me that his eyes “used to be pretty, but then, when there was the war, the apartment was hit by a shell. I got scared, because I was only four, and my eyes went wrong.” Now, when he is excited he gets cross-eyed. Also, he cries out in his sleep. Perhaps he should be given a tranquilizer before bed. But what kind of a tranquilizer would keep him from reacting to nightly shoot-outs?

Day 40

Today we went to the Moscow Zoo. Aslan spent an hour and a half out of the three by the orangutan cage. The orangutan was completely psyched by the curiosity of his visitors. He embraced his head with his hands and pressed his nose against the glass. Aslan pressed his nose to the other side of the glass. He was whispering to the orangutan, who would close his eyes sadly and mutter something in response. In the end, I had to tear the human cub away by force, pulling at his jacket from behind.

On the way home, a professional panhandler, a young woman with a child, boarded our subway car. The cardboard she carried read: “Sorry to bother you, but my husband has

gone missing, and I have no food for the children.” Aslan looked at me to see if I would give her money. When we got out, I explained the young woman’s business.

“Why then do you give money to the old man who plays accordion at our market?”

“Because he is old, and he does not beg but works for it.”

Aslan likes to hang around me while I cook. He volunteers for the peeling and cutting jobs and would not miss sticking his nose into the pan to see what is cooking and how it’s doing. He told me about his method of fighting hunger pangs: “If I am very hungry, I buy a pack of instant noodles, they call it Rolton, you know? And I chew on them dry. Try it; it is very tasty.”

There is a candle that I keep on the kitchen table. I light it occasionally in the evenings. “Do you like this kind of lighting?” asked Aslan. “We used candles for two years, and I got tired of them.”

Day 43

This evening we had guests. They brought their children with them; the boy was about Aslan’s age. All the children had gathered in the children’s room. Aslan left the room silently and sat to watch TV. Then he refused to come to the table. After the guests had left, I asked him to explain his behavior. “It was awfully improper what you did. The guests ought to be entertained.”

“I did not want to be with them because they would have been looking at me.”

“Of course, they would have been looking at you. How else do people socialize?”

“You don’t understand! I am different from them. That is why they would look...”

Before going to bed, I went to check on the boys. They were lying on the sofa, in one another’s embrace. Without really much hope of my consent, since it was late, Aslan pleaded: “Could I tell him the tale about the princess and the pea? I’ll tell it real quick.”

Day 44

There was mutiny on the ship. Vacation had ended and Aslan tried to skip the first day of school. His argument: “I cannot go. I threw away my notebooks.” The only justification for the outburst that followed was that my anger was righteous. Next morning, he was the first to wake up and to leave for the hated school.

Aslan has gotten into the habit of watching TV news. Surprisingly, he does not show any interest in news on Chechnya. His only comment on terrorists blowing up a shuttle bus was “That is on the road that goes past my house.” But events in Iraq elicit a most lively response: “Just think of it, they dumped 200,000 tons of flour from the planes for them (the Iraqi civilians). Now they’ll make cakes for themselves.”

Aslan is increasingly sympathetic toward the Americans. Moreover, his support for President Bush’s army rises in direct proportion to the success of their operations.

“Aslan, but the Americans have attacked Iraq, and civilians are dying?”

“So what? I am for the Americans because they are winning.” What the hell is wrong with him?

Day 50

They called from Grozny and told me I could send Aslan back with the traders on the shuttle in a few days. Aslan was exited by the news and ran to pack his bag. Then he found me in the kitchen, “I wouldn’t go, but I miss my Mom.”

We went for a walk around the Bolshoi Theater. “Is it the biggest theater in world?”

“No, just our main theater.”

“Then it is not so interesting.”

We saw Volochkova standing by the staff entrance. “Look, Aslan, that is a famous ballerina.”

“She is so ugly.”

Both of us have the blues. Even the ice cream we had in the GUM mall did not cheer us up. “Do you think there will be a time when I could come live here?”

“Certainly. You just need to study.”

“I will. Tell me what I need to do, and I’ll do everything. I don’t want to live in Grozny any more. I want to live here.” I want him to live here, too.

Day 52

This is our last weekend together. I ask Aslan where he wants to go. Aslan chooses Red Square. There he decided to enlighten Dima and pointed to the Kremlin, “See? This

is where Putin sits.” But Dima objected vigorously, “He cannot be in the Kremlin, because he is on the news.

In the evening, after we’d finished packing, we were standing by the window. “Do not collect any more hand grenades, OK? And don’t go in that old house. Watch where you put your feet, and don’t get caught in ... you know what. Drink boiled water.”

I am petting his crew cut and dropping tears on his head. He turns to me, “Do you remember I didn’t want to take off my hat? Isn’t it funny?”

* * *

Time to get this war over with. I am sick of it.

Mark Rozovsky (Moscow) A Disastrous Victory



Kontinent, October 23, 2003

What follows are excerpts from a lengthy article by Mark Rozovsky, playwright, director and the head of a theater in Moscow, U Nikitskikh Vorot (At the Nikitskie Gates). The author recounts his experiences when his daughter was taken hostage by Chechen terrorists and reflects on what led to the deaths of more than 160 people in this tragedy.

THE evening performance of *Strider – The Story of a Horse* had just ended at my theater, the theater by the Nikitskie Gates. I was walking to my office when someone ran up to me, “Mark, turn on the TV.” After one glimpse, my wife Tanya and I were on our way.

The hostage taking at the theater on Dubrovka Street held the most terrifying possibility, the loss of my daughter. She had been playing a part in the musical *Nord-Ost* for the last year. There was every chance she was at the theater right now.

I called Lana, my former wife, from the car on my mobile, “Where is Sasha?” Lana answered in a whisper: “In the theater auditorium.”

“And you? Where are you?”

“I cannot talk.” That was the beginning of the round-the-clock hell of those days.

* * *

I am trying to reach Lana again, with no result. I had finally found Sasha’s mobile number and called her thirty times in a row, but it was no use. There was no connection.

At the turn to Dubrovka we run into a police cordon. The traffic police send us to Melnikov Street, but it, too, is cordoned off.

I park the car and try to push through the wall of people in body armor armed with automatic rifles.

“My daughter is there, let me through.”

“You cannot go in there without a pass.”

“Where do I get the pass?”

“At headquarters.”

“How do I get to headquarters?”

“You need a pass.”

Normal catch-22: we have long been accustomed to this in Russia. There is no way to fight it. When you are not an observer, but actually caught in it, you feel impotent and insignificant. Still, I try reasoning with them. “But how can I get a pass to headquarters if you will not let me go there to get one?”

Their answer is no less logical than my question: “Take your questions elsewhere. We have instructions not to let anybody through without a pass, and we do what we have been told.”

It is drizzling and the street is dark. The crowd beyond the cordon grows. Each new arrival makes a useless attempt to move closer to the building where his or her relatives are suffering.

No official comes to brief us, and we know nothing of what is going on. This causes hysteria, panic, rumors and more rumors. Someone says there are a hundred Chechens – forty of them are women – and all of them ready to die. They have stuffed the building with explosives and are awaiting orders from bin Laden to blow it up. It doesn't sound very plausible, but after September 11 any horrifying possibility is believable.

A rumor spreads that Chechen snipers are on the roofs of surrounding buildings.

“What for?”

“To kill us along with the hostages.”

Another version is that the shooting will begin when Putin comes, any minute now. “Dream on! Will he come here to make you happy? He will direct everything from the Kremlin.”

“Not to direct, to negotiate.”

“Negotiate with bandits? Never.”

“Then all of ours will die.”

“But theirs will die too!”

“They'll storm the building.”

“That would kill everybody for sure.”

“If this is true, they will not storm.”

Rain continues to fall from the dark sky. Armored personnel carriers and ambulances cut puddles as they drive by on their way to the theater. A correspondent from radio station Echo Moskvi¹ finds me in the crowd. “Would you talk on the air with Sergei Buntman?”

“What can I tell him? I don’t know anything.”

“Tell him what you think needs to be said.”

I tell Sergei that my daughter is in there, that I am in shock and – like everybody else – I am afraid the explosives will be detonated. I fear for the lives of the hostages sitting on a power keg...

“What do you think should be done?” the radio anchorman asks. “I don’t know,” I say in confusion. “The most important thing is to save the hostages.”

What else could I tell him?

* * *

War in Chechnya? No, war in Moscow. It has come to us, and now it is exhaling the revolting breath of death into our nostrils.

All of us in this crowd were strangers a moment ago. A common tragedy unites us; we share a common name: “relatives of the hostages.”

“The terrorists have only one demand: stop the war in Chechnya.”

“And nothing else?”

“Nothing else.”

I’m no terrorist, but I want the war in Chechnya to end too; however, I don’t plan to blow up anybody to end the war.

“They are scum! They are playing with lives of innocent people!”

Yes, but it is not only Chechen militants who’ve died in Chechnya: We’ve seen Samashki, Starye Atagi, Pervomaisk, Budenovsk, Basaev and Budanov, cut ears and

¹ A liberal radio station founded in Moscow during the 1991 putsch. It broadcasts to several regions of Russia.

severed heads, refugees and tears of mothers on both sides. Who can say for sure, without a close look at each death, which of the sides was more guilty in causing it.

War is evil and terror is evil, and neither can be justified.

* * *

I make one more attempt to get to headquarters. I find an officer who seems to be in charge of the cordon. I try to talk calmly: "I can offer to substitute myself for my daughter as a hostage. The Chechens will accept it. I am more valuable to them. At the same time, I can carry out a secret mission for headquarters."

The officer looks at me as if I am an idiot and responds in a mocking tone, or at least it sounds mocking to me, "Step aside, citizen."

Everything as it should be. All of us are told to step aside, not to meddle in the Chechen war. Our only part is at the receiving end – to receive our children in caskets. And they have the gall to call us citizens.

Who are we? Citizens of Russia! Step aside, citizens of Russia!

Resolutely, I again approach the officer, "Maybe you could let me through or report to your superiors? You see, I need to take part in this. I am Mark Rozovsky."

The officer responds firmly, in a low voice: "Your help is not needed, Mr. Rozovsky. They have professionals, specialists there. They know what to do and how to do it. They will manage without you and make the right decisions. You shouldn't worry."

Later, I shall realize the symbolic significance of these words, but that will be after the storming.

* * *

The endless tap-tap of the rain had turned puddles into seas. Tanya and I were chilled to the bone. We dashed to a nearby gas station, bought a bottle of brandy to warm up and joined a band of young reporters in search of roundabout paths to bring us closer to the theater at the opposite side. There we ran into another, no less formidable, cordon and Sergei Yastrzhembsky, Putin's public relations aid. I ran up to him and this is what he told me: "All the children have been freed and are on a bus. Your wife (meaning my former wife, Lana) has been freed and is at headquarters, together with Nechaev (her husband, former head of the Ministry of Economy and currently president of a financial corporation, who, fortunately, had enough pull to get into headquarters).

I rejoice at the news, but not for long. I call Andrei Nechaev, who tells me that, yes, Lana has been freed by *spetsnaz* (no details), but Sasha is not on any bus and remains “there.”

I plead with Lana, talking breathlessly: “Lana, I am standing a hundred meters from you. Ask Andrei to come out and take me in with him. I can be of help, tell somebody in charge...”

“No, no need. None of this is necessary.”

She hangs up. Of course, she is not herself now; she has been freed and her daughter remains in mortal danger. But she is physically closer to Sasha than I am!

Suddenly, from the direction of the theater, come sounds of automatic rifles fire, then the muffled sound of an explosion... God, have mercy on us! Then there is silence, menacing and unbearable. Thank God, the storming has not begun yet; people perishing is not yet unavoidable.

Tanya and I spend the rest of that sleepless night by the TV, hopping from channel to channel in search of anything on the hostage situation.

* * *

The second 24 hours come and go. Some small positive developments: a few hostages have been released. But everybody radiates optimism; there will be no storming, and some clairvoyant predicts that everything will be okay.

Couldn't it be that it really will?

From time to time, I dial Sasha's number. Who knows what is happening there? A miracle might happen and she might answer.

But no miracles so far. Instead there is reality in the shape of 18 women wearing suicide belts, each outfitted with two kilos of plastic explosives, with nails and metal balls. They are called walking bombs. The forty children sitting in the balcony, and the adults who are with them, will be the first to be blown into the air and then crash down on the heads of those beneath.

* * *

At 5 a.m. the phone rings. Tanya picks up the receiver.

“Tanya, it is me, Sasha. You probably know that we have been taken hostage. Tell father to gather his friends in Red Square this morning for a rally against the war in Chechnya, or they will kill us off. If there is a rally, they will let us go after 2 p.m. ...maybe... Us, means the children from the cast of *Nord-Ost*.”

Then nothing but beeps. Tanya did not have time to ask anything. But it was clear from the tone of Sasha's voice and her hurried speech that she spoke as she was directed – not in her own words and not in her own voice.

Later Sasha will tell us: “All the children were on the balcony. We slept on the floor, between the rows of chairs. We used seats taken from unoccupied chairs as cushions... We had been sleeping when suddenly awakened by a shot... He fired a shot to wake us up...”

“Who's this he?”

“Somebody they had, the handsome one... looked like Ricky Martin.”

“Like who?”

“Father! Like Ricky Martin, the singer.”

“Why did he wake you up in the middle of the night?”

“There was a woman, one of theirs...”

I notice that Sasha never called them terrorists, as we did, but somebody, woman. This was not Stockholm Syndrome, but rather a child avoiding adult words, an intuitive rejection of politics, of life's horrors.

“And what about this woman?”

“She said that we must call home and say what she will tell us to say. She gave us several mobile phones.”

What was I to do? Not go to the rally? Ignore the night call, go to bed, wait for the “professionals” to free everybody or for the “negotiators” to negotiate something?

I waited impatiently for morning to come and then rushed to Red Square. I was responding to the plea of my daughter who was sitting in a mined balcony, and I could not care less whether or not the Moscow government had sanctioned the meeting. I believed that no chance to help the children, however small, should be missed. If the most important thing is to save the hostages, then let us try to save them – by deeds, not words. Whether it is a rally or something else, we should at least do something. That is why I was surprised to see police barring the entrance to Red Square from Vasilyevsky Spusk.

“If they grant permission to hold the rally, we will let you through. If not, you will stay here.”

There, by the walls of the St. Basil's Cathedral, I was joined by my true friends and colleagues, Alexander Gelman, Yuri Ryashentsev, Mikhail Kozakov, Vladimir Dolinsky.² Many others – some familiar, some unknown to me – continued to arrive. But clearly, there were not enough of us for an impressive show of force.

There were many reporters and a few TV cameramen. All were nervously excited to the extreme.

I give an interview to Echo Moskvi, calling on Muscovites to come to the rally.

“A bus from Dubrovka with relatives of hostages is coming...”

“Yastrzhembsky is meeting with the Moscow government about whether to permit the rally this very moment. Don't start yet. The decision will be known in 15 minutes.”

We wait, though it is not clear for what; we already have enough people to begin. And finally the news, “Yastrzhembsky says that to have the rally sanctioned at least a thousand people should be gathered.”

To whom did he say it? Was that exactly what he said? There is no time to find out. The improvised banners are up, and I am the first speaker: “Damn the war! Damn terror! I don't want my daughter to die at 14!...”

More speeches, wonderful speeches – and then a provocateur: “The Caucasus to the Caucasian people! Russians out of Chechnya! It is your Yeltsin who started the war. Every Russian “democrat” should be put on trial!”

“Who are you? What is your name?” I ask.

“I am an Azerbaijani journalist.”

He is lying. I have been in Baku many times and know what the Azerbaijani accent sounds like.

“Get out of here! We are not here for you to indulge your xenophobia”.

This is the end of our unsanctioned rally. Now we will wait and see whether, after 2 p.m., the children are released.

* * *

They are not released.

For some, this is a cause to rejoice: for those who believe that the terrorists should be given no concessions, for the hostage-taking organizers and for those whose hands are

² Playwright, poet and two actors.

now free to use force to free the hostages. The latter have a strong argument on their side now – bandits cannot be expected to honor their part of a bargain.

By the evening of October 25, I had come to a sad conclusion: they will storm, and anyone who says otherwise is lying. Evidence confirming this were mounting.

First of all, refusing to sanction the anti-war rally had been an indication that the “professionals” did not want anybody to interfere with their plans. Society should be prepared to accept the use of force, and nothing that presents an alternative will be allowed. On the eve of the storming, the professionals need to convince the public that every peaceful initiative has failed, that there is no solution but to strike at the terrorists.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy³ is a man to listen to at critical moments: he lets things slip that could prepare us for the craziest courses of action. This time, in a radio interview from Iran, he shouted his advice: “First, use gas, then attack. Those who survive, survive; those who don’t, don’t. They will be the minority!” Whether Sasha will be in the minority or the majority, the scenario does not say.

The ban on live TV reporting from the scene is the second indication that the theater will be stormed. They have announced that starting on the morning of October 26 reporting will be selective.

Third, we have been told that the terrorist intend to begin executing hostages at 6 a.m. Who announced it? Logically, this important announcement, arguably the most important of those that can be made, should originate with the terrorists. Baraev⁴ himself should have announced it on TV to further the terrorists’ tactics of intimidation. But he did not. This terrifying information came from a second-hand source and had not been confirmed by the terrorists. We suspect that it is a fabrication, part of preparations for storming the theater.

The cordon’s perimeter is being extended further and further from the theater: 50 meters, then another 50 meters, then another 100. This means they anticipate a battle, an explosion, bomb fragments.

Assurances that that there will be no storming grow louder as we get closer to the morning of the 26th. Signs of a coming disaster multiply. I begin to sense the unavoidable, the imminence of the storming. A place has been prepared to house the wounded. *Spetsnaz*, rumor has it, is conducting exercises at an identical building. (I happen to know this building, the cultural center Meridian; we have held many performances there.)

³ Leader of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. The party was created in the early ’90s, many believe, by the KGB.

⁴ Movsar Baraev, leader of the terrorist group.

The last realization, common sense though cynical, is that storming would be useful. It would be a “step in the worldwide struggle against international terrorism.” So, everything is moving in the right direction – except that Sasha is in the theater, along with 800 other potential victims

* * *

On the afternoon of the 25th, I had received a call from Savik Shuster’s assistant inviting me to take part in his television program *Freedom of Speech*.⁵ I felt it was my duty to accept the invitation.

In the studio, I asked Shuster whether it would be possible not to stress that my daughter is among the hostages: “They will be watching the show too, and it could affect my daughter’s situation.” But we were taking unnecessary precautions: I did not know that by then *Izvestia* had already published the full list of the hostages, including, of course, my Sasha.

Ten minutes before we went live, they warned us to mind what we say so as not to provoke the terrorists who would be a part of our TV audience. I took this advice to heart.

Thank God I was not the only one that evening who felt the growing danger of an attack. Everyone who spoke was of the same mind: Senseless sacrifice of lives should not be allowed to happen. The war in Chechnya should be stopped, and not because it had been demanded by the terrorists, but because war is a thorn in the flesh of the people anywhere.

I was very nervous; I hadn’t slept for two nights. So what I said for the cameras was confused and inarticulate.

I said that the time had come to finish – in deeds, not merely in words – what should not have been started, meaning the Chechen war. Those who hold our children hostage are committing violence, but they are mistaken in believing that only violence can stop violence. However, we share their mistaken belief and because of that, we are driving the situation to a dead end. Violence gives birth to a chain of violence, and there is nothing but death at the end of this chain.

I said that the motherland has responsibilities to her children. And if she has been sending them to senseless deaths in Afghanistan and Chechnya, it must finally stop.

“Today,” I said, “the right step would be to set aside rhetoric about how we care so much about the individual and for the country’s leadership to make the political decision to

⁵ A talk show running on the then-national, semi-independent television channel NTV.

take “redundant troops” out of Chechnya. I am not an expert, and I cannot say what redundant troops are. Perhaps all the troops should be taken out of there. But I feel, as a common citizen, that the president should come before the people and say, ‘Dear friends! Today, to save people’s lives, to free the hostages, I am forced, I stress it, forced, to do what the terrorists demand.’ ”

I said that however difficult it may be, there is, unfortunately, no other way that I can see to save the hostages, each one of them. I could be accused of not being a patriot for making such a proposal. But today, when Roshal and Kobzon, both Jews, are obtaining the release of hostages from these Russian people,⁶ why don’t I see Russian patriots doing the same?

* * *

What we have all feared the most has begun. My heart is pounding. I am frozen in horror as we wait for the theater building to explode. But it did not happen and that was a victory.

Between the first carefully dolled out reports, we see apocalyptic footage of *spetsnaz* soldiers carrying poisoned people out of the building. Many are unconscious, their arms swinging. They are laid down on the concrete right at the building’s entrance. Are they dead? Undoubtedly, some are. I search for Sasha in this swirling crowd.

From early morning to noon, we are frantic. Where is she? The two information telephone numbers are hopelessly busy.

“Call Roshal,” says Tanya, “he knows you.”

It’s true, we have met, but still, “It would be awkward.”

“Nothing is awkward; she has been a hostage. It is perfectly all right to call him.”

Within half an hour, we learn that Sasha is in the Rusakovskaya hospital. At 1 p.m. we are there. Sasha has an IV drip attached to her arm; her face is pale and puffy, but there is laughter in her eyes.

My daughter is alive! She has survived!

* * *

One hundred and twenty-nine dead. Is it many or a few? The very question is unacceptable. Ask Victoria Zaslavskaya, an actress from our theater, who searched Moscow morgues for 24 hours for her 13-year-old son, Arseny, and found him dead. What would she say?

⁶ The terrorists allowed Leonid Roshal, a prominent pediatrician, and Iosif Kobzon, a popular singer, into the theater, and the terrorists released several children into their custody.

But I am an immensely happy father today. And I am immensely grateful to the unknown *spetsnaz* soldier who carried Sasha out of the building.

I asked the chief physician of the Rusakovskaya Children's Hospital when Sasha arrived there. "An ambulance with eight children arrived at 7:15 a.m. Three of the children were immediately put in intensive care. Your daughter walked in and even gave her name, Sasha Rozovskaya. We asked her for her registered address, but she could not answer – her thinking was clouded, distracted."

Sasha was gassed just like everybody else. She survived because she got extremely lucky. She was one of the first carried out. Had she remained there for a half an hour or an hour, her fate would have been as tragic as the fates of Arseny and Krisitina, who had been sitting next to her.

"Kristina cried a lot!" Sasha told me later. "She was very nervous all the time."

"And you?"

"I was holding her hand. Holding very tight and whispering to her to stop it."

Standing by Arseny's and Krisitina's graves at Vagankovskoye Cemetery a few days later, I saw in my mind's eye with bitterness and pain, these two children sitting on the theater balcony. Why should it be them, our children, who must pay with their lives for the war in Chechnya? How can we continue living after them and not feel ashamed of ourselves, both Russians and Chechens?

I knew Arseny from birth. He and Sasha had become the theater's adopted children of sorts. They were always together, and they went together to perform in *Nord-Ost*. On October 5 Arseny played a leading role. He had 20 days of life remaining to him.

* * *

So far, no one has shown that the storming was the only way to save the lives of the hostages. Facts learned since indicate that the decision to use force was made at the outset, a murderous plan based on the unchanging belief of godless people that ends justify means.

Izvestia reported on October 26, "On Friday evening deployment of forces began at the Dubrovka theater center. Our source within the FSB, who was on duty at the center, confirmed the information: 'Watch TV tonight. In a few hours, this will all be over,' our source promised."

How does this fit with the official explanation that the storm was begun because two hostages had been executed? Or was this alleged execution planned? The security ser-

vices needed a pretext to start the storming, and if it could not be found it had to be fabricated.

“The storming was a measure forced by circumstances, because the terrorists had threatened to start executing the hostages. Not true. The truth is that there were no executions. If there had been, why have not we been told the names of the executed? They should have been buried with all the honors accorded heroes who had fallen in the struggle against terrorism. There were no funerals, because there was no one to bury. There were no executions, just a pretext for using the gas. The evildoers had to be shown for who they are, for the good of the cause.

The same cause was served by the death of Olga Romanova, a girl who had rushed to free the hostages single-handedly. A simple soul! By some marvel, she managed to get into the building, as drunk as she was, where she was killed. Who is responsible for her death? The terrorists, no doubt. But there is a mystery to this murder that has not been investigated: who let her through to the building? I was on Dubrovka Street the first night, and I can testify that not a fly could have passed through the cordon. A provocation? Somebody decided: let the foolish girl through, this could play into our hands. A human life can be sacrificed to a larger end, for the good of the cause, of course. I would like to hope that was not what happened. But why then have the cordon officers whom the invisible Olga Romanova passed not been held responsible?

In a civilized country, in a country where the authorities are responsible to the people, there should be more than just a general inquiry. Each victim’s death should have had an investigation. There should have been investigation into the death of everyone one who died, not only because of the terrorist act but also because of the measures we had taken to counter it. But there were reasons why the State Duma refused to create a commission to investigate and report honestly on the circumstances of the tragedy at the Dubrovka theater. The Duma has covered itself with indelible shame.

Seleznev⁷ has had his say that Savik Shuster went into hysterics on the NTV show, on the eve of the storming. He could not understand that we, participants in the *Freedom of Speech* program, were doing everything we could to save people, while he, Seleznev, was sitting by the TV set gorging on his own “patriotism” and “steely will.” We “hysterical defeatists” were also patriotically snubbed by Oleg Osetinsky⁸ in *Izvestia* on October 30. We know where patriotism and steely will take us. “We will pay any price.” We have learned it by heart.⁹ We will pay all right. The only problem is that those who set the price and those who pay it are not the same people.

⁷ Gennady Seleznev, then speaker of the State Duma, a deputy from the Communist Party.

⁸ A screenwriter and journalist.

⁹ Here the author quotes not President Kennedy, as an American reader might conjecture, but a popular anti-war song by Bulat Okudzhava, Russian poet and singer.

Some victory! They lost 40 and we lost 129!

Some would say, “But there could have been more casualties! If not for the gas, everybody would have died.”

No, my friends! Nobody would have died, if not for the gas.

* * *

“We have not been driven to our knees,” said the president. Well said. “We could not save everybody.” In fact, we did not even try.

I agree the situation was a most difficult one, but this was precisely the kind of situation that puts everything we are and everything we have to the test: our spirit, culture, patriotism, conscience and sense of duty.

The chaos that followed the storming did not come from the imaginations of hysterical defeatists. It was a classic example of criminal negligence and irresponsibility on the part of planners of the counter-terrorist operation. As Zhvanetsky¹⁰ aptly put it, we have “power-exercising bodies,” but what we need are “intelligence-exercising bodies.” Is there an explanation for why our professionals failed to think through the rescue part of the operation? Of course, they expected casualties, but not on this scale.

The Alpha *spetsnaz* assault group, who were wearing gas masks when they entered the building, should have been followed by a medical battalion armed with syringes. Everyone in the building should have received a shot of the antidote.¹¹ But they did not even have stretchers, just a few of them. There were only 80 ambulances, not nearly enough for 800 poisoned people. They loaded 100 people onto five buses, and many of these people did not make it to the hospitals alive. The vehicles were termed death buses. What happened inside those buses on the way to the hospitals only the Devil himself knows; he visited the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Now everything can be blamed on the terrorists. But murderers among the terrorists cannot compare with the murderers on our, so to say, side. Everybody is afraid of calling a spade a spade, but I repeat: It was possible to try to avoid mass murder of our own by our own. It was possible to avoid the storming.

Incidentally, there was no storming per se. There was a swift gas attack that made combat unnecessary. Of course, there was more gas released than necessary. There is a jus-

¹⁰ A popular satirist.

¹¹ The gas used was reportedly Kolokol-1, developed in the '70s by the KGB. It is believed that it is based on Fentanyl (used for anesthesia) and/or Carfentanil, both highly potent opiates. Naloxone is an effective antidote for an overdose of opiates (Wikipedia).

tification for that: not to allow the suicide bombers time to set off the explosives. Why were no explosives detonated?

This is a serious question. Many of the hostages, indeed most, said they heard shots before they passed out. This means the terrorists had 15 to 30 seconds in which to realize that these were their last minutes.¹² Moreover, being dispersed throughout the auditorium, they did not pass out simultaneously. Had they been waiting for an order that never came? This seems unlikely; more probably, the suicide bombers were given discretion to act on their own at a critical moment. Each had the chance to depart for Paradise as a happy, revenging hero. This was what they came for.

Why then did they not blow up the auditorium? At the very least, they could have killed half the hostages just by spraying the auditorium with their Kalashnikov rifles, or by throwing half a dozen hand grenades. They did not do it. Why? Why didn't they choose martyrdom, death for the cause? Because, as they said from the outset, they did not want to commit suicide: "We don't want to kill you. We want you to stop killing us." Strange kind of terrorists! On one hand, they are bandits who have taken eight hundred innocent people hostage; on the other hand, whom did they actually kill, except for Olga Romanova used as a stooge? Let's have some names!

Were their explosives real explosives? This is another important question. If the explosives were real and the terrorists chose not to use them, they deserve to be called martyrs. If the explosives were fake, did the security services know it? And if they did not and believed the explosives were real, storming was completely unacceptable, because there was no guarantee that the gas could bring about a successful operation.

* * *

Each day I am asked by people I know and by complete strangers, "How is your daughter? How is Sasha?" They expect me to answer, "Everything is fine, she is in good health." I oblige and sometimes add that "everything is in the past."

But it is not strictly true: her blood tests are unstable. One day they are normal, another day they are not, and this may last a long time. The consequences of severe poisoning are unpredictable. Something may surface in a year or three or even later. The only hope lies in the strength of a young body to resist.

A knowledgeable doctor told me, "This is like Chernobyl: nobody knows how it will turn out."

¹² Probably the terrorists had had much more time than that to act, since, as reported by the hostages, some of them had put on gas masks.

Sasha had found enough strength to cope with the deaths of Arseny and Kristina, which surprised even her psychologist. He told us, “Your daughter has enormous psycho-physical resources.” I don’t know whether it is true, but she went almost straight from the hospital to the burial service for them at the church in the Vaganovskoye Cemetery. I think that what this 14-year-old girl went through in those days would have been enough for some adults to last them for life.

Today Sasha behaves and reacts adequately; her wounded soul heals and matures. We don’t press her to tell us what it was like there. We are satisfied with what she tells on her own, and she is reluctant to talk about it, at least for now. But of course she cannot forget her experiences; it shows in small incidents. We were standing recently by the elevator door when it opened and our neighbor came out. Ignat is a fine young man who studies law at Moscow University. He grew a short black beard and, by chance, was dressed in a fatigue jacket. Sasha recoiled as if stung.

Or another incident. She went with her new friend Alisa to a premier at our theater. There is a comic scene in which a policewoman shoots a blank into the air during an encounter with a hoodlum. The whole audience burst into laughter, as if on a cue, but Sasha, at the sound of the shot, hid her head behind the back of the seat in front. She was the only one in the audience who reacted this way.

“Sasha,” I asked her recently, “would you like to play the girl in my musical *Perfumer*?”

“No, father,” she responded firmly.

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to play a victim.”

I was flabbergasted, but decided not to argue. Some day I will try to explain to her that with this attitude she cannot be an actress. Its would mean foregoing many plays in the world’s theatrical repertory, because heroines of the greatest plays, more often than not, are victims. But I will not try it now. Time heals, life goes on and brings new experiences, and this is where hope lies.

I can understand my Sasha: to be a victim is unbearable, on the stage and in life.

Andrei Kolesnikov (Moscow) Life After Death



Kommersant, September 6, 2004

The number of dead at Beslan school №1 has climbed above 300, and the number of missing is approaching the number of dead. More than half in each category are children. Never in the history of the world have so many hostages died. Andrei Kolesnikov reports from Beslan.

Open house day

ON Friday the battle at School № 1 continued till dark. The school was on fire, and the firefighting proceeded along with the battle. Fire engines would drive into the neighboring schoolyard of School № 6, fill their water tanks and drive back to the fire. There was a man standing near a fire engine, an Ossetian of about 30, in dirty, burnt clothing.

“Are you from there,” I asked. He nodded. “We came in with the Alpha¹ team.” I wanted to ask if he is a firefighter, but he had anticipated my question: “Well, I am somewhere between a firefighter and something else. Better not ask. You can call me Anzor,” he offered. “You would not understand my job, and there could be trouble.”

During the summer, they had been doing remodeling in the school. Workers left a hole for a water pipe unfinished in the gymnasium wall. Now the hole had become a large breach, and some firefighter armed with sledgehammers and crowbars were working to widen it further.

“Did it take long to make the breach?”

“No, not long. Took longer to climb in. It was a commercial gym, I think, not the gymnasium where the children were. We got into the gymnasium after the first explosion, and everything was on fire. We came in and there were mountains of bodies – men and women and children. The children were naked from the waste up. There was not a space to put a foot, but we had to move in. And we went.”

He confesses his own voice sounds strange to him. “Is this me talking?” he asks doubtfully.

¹ Alpha Group, a special forces counter-terrorist unit.

“Of course.”

“I don’t understand. It seems the words are mine, and all this has happened to me, but I hear it said by somebody else, from afar. Could it be possible?”

“Of course,” I comfort him.

“We pulled some people out of the gymnasium. I brought out four. The Alpha guys were pulling people out at the opposite side of the room. People were lying around as if in clumps. Many have been pressed into the corners by the blast, or maybe they’d just rushed there. There were not many alive. But how we were to know who was alive and who wasn’t? Twice I made a mistake. I pulled a girl out, and then there was the second explosion. Just before that I saw two girls in a window; they were shouting and waving a handkerchief. One about seven and an older one. There were gunmen sitting beneath them shooting at the Alpha team from under barrel bloopers. I waved to the girls that I was coming to get them. They laughed happily. Then there was the explosion. I have not seen the girls since. I am going to search for them in the school, they should be still there.”

The fire brigade supervisor was issuing orders: “All units. Top the tanks and back to the school! Extinguish the second floor! Everybody goes! The gunmen are dead! There is nobody there! What, somebody does not want to go? Does everybody go? What are we waiting for then!”

“Three of them are still sitting on the second floor,” Anzor drones on, as if to himself. “They are defending the second floor. There was this machine gunner, like he was made of steel; he was a wonder. They tried to take him down with rocket grenades. You name it, they used it all on him, but he was still holding up. He sat between the second floor and the roof... what is it called... yea, the attic... I think it was him who took down the Alpha guys. He was a pro, fought back good. From the neighboring house a gunman with an automatic rifle was giving no mercy. He caused huge problems. They are all lying downstairs now. I saw seven. There is a Negro, and an Arab is lying...”

There were several large explosions.

“No kidding!” said Anzor surprised, animated. “They are using tanks on them. Looks like there are serious problems. Meanwhile, the people have to do their job, to fight this fire.” He continues, “The Negro was killed two days ago, when they were taking over the school. He’s been lying there and got eaten by worms a bit. The Arab, they laid him on a door panel, put bandages on him – it’s their custom – and put him in the sun to dry. Wanted to mummify him, sons of bitches!” he added, suddenly getting angry. “One of them tried to get away; he was pushing a child about twelve in front of himself, but his nerves gave way and he blew himself up.”

“And what about the child?”

“Well, the child too, of course, did not survive. Another gunman was pulled out half dead. People almost tore him to bits while he was being taken to the department, but somehow he was rescued and brought to headquarters in one piece. I agree he should have been rescued. He, at least in some way, could be made useful to society.”

“Man your vehicles!” I heard the command.

“OK, I have to go,” said Anzor. “I’ll take a look at how the things are.”

I went to the local cultural center, where the journalists were stationed. It was 2.30 a.m. and there was almost nobody left outside. A sleepy fellow in undershorts with a press accreditation card dangling over his shirt emerged from a tent erected on the grass and headed for the bushes. A technician from Channel 1 was coiling wires. There were no more explosions. An hour later, the fire trucks started coming back. The firefighters said that there was nothing left of the gymnasium, that they had no trouble extinguishing the second floor fire. There really were no more gunmen.

I flagged down a car going my way, which was easy since Beslan drivers were picking up every one who asked. We were leaving Beslan and had already made the turn to Vladikavkaz, when we saw a huge cortege silently coming our way, lights flashing and every headlight blazing. The cortege swam slowly by us. We counted at least a dozen cars. Who could it be at that time of night? We made a U-turn and placed ourselves at the cortege’s tail. But they were no fools. A police car dropped behind the cortege and stopped in front of us. They stayed inside, and so did we. After a while the police car sped away. The cortege stopped about 200 meters from operation headquarters. The area was cordoned off immediately. We could do nothing but leave. This was the president coming from the Beslan airport.

Parents’ day

Early in the morning, I watched the soldiers cordon off the school. The cordon perimeter went by the walls of the cultural center. It had never extended so far from the school, not even in the first days of the hostage crisis. I circled the perimeter and found it well protected. The Ossetians did not understand what was happening. They wanted to get to the school because their children were there. Every family in Beslan has been affected by this calamity. They want to see their children. I realize this was precisely why they were not let in.

“Do you know what is happening there?” a middle-aged woman asked me and motioned in the direction of the school. “The horror continues, otherwise they would not put up the cordon.”

She and her compound neighbors could not find their children: six-year-old Madina Bukhaeva, thirteen-year-old Soso Bigonashvili, and others, six all together. “We have been everywhere: the morgues, the hospitals, checked everything,” the woman said tiredly. “I was crying, a soldier from the cordon line came and asked me who of mine was dead. I told him that maybe she was not dead, and he left. Agunda is no more, Aza is no more...,” the woman counted mechanically. “What have they done to us?”

I was approached by another woman at another place along the cordon: “Do you know what is happening in the basement there? The gunmen are hiding with hostages again,” she said quietly. “They are negotiating, but with no results so far. The gunmen don’t want to talk and don’t make any demands. This is where our children are! We cannot find them because they are hidden in the basement! Oh, God, when will this all end?”

I tried to comfort her, told her that there were no more gunmen; therefore, there could be no hostages and that the school is cordoned off because of the mines. She listened eagerly. I caught myself believing her more than I believed my own words.

I had circled almost the entire perimeter. At one place, I came across some agitated men. Anzor Margiev was looking for his twelve-year-old niece, Elvira.

“She and her mother were standing in the gymnasium when a ceiling block fell after the explosion,” Anzor explained. “The mother remained on her feet, but the girl got pinned down and the mother could not pull her free. The ceiling was coming down, so she picked up a three-year-old boy and ran. He was not hers, but the children were not mine and theirs – there were no theirs. You see over there; that’s Elvira’s father sitting on the bench. He has not talked to anybody for over a day and looks much aged. And the girl is lying there. I know exactly the place where she is and I can find her, but they won’t let us in there!”

“How will you get on with the Ingush and Chechens?” I ask. “We’ll see what needs to be done about the Ingush,” an old Ossetian responded. “But we have to begin with our own. Who were the people who did renovations in the school? What kind of Ingush were they? Why were they allowed to work there? The administration was proud of itself for saving money, happy that the Ingush did not ask for much. But they hid an arsenal under the gymnasium floor. Everybody knows it. Maybe somebody was paid off. We will learn everything. We have our ways.”

I stopped a boy and asked him how to get closer to the school. He showed me. It was not difficult: somebody’s backyard, a fence, a footpath... The gate in the fence of the next yard opened onto the school’s central entrance.

Five stretchers a minute

I have a good view of what is happening in the schoolyard. The rescue workers are carrying black plastic bags out of the gymnasium and putting them on the pavement. Three days ago, this was where the opening ceremony was to commence on the first day of school. They are also carrying out debris. They use the same kind of stretchers for both. They put the debris on the left and the black bags on the right. There were many workers, and they worked rapidly. They were carrying out about five bodies a minute. They had been working for more than an hour, although they stopped now and then for a smoke.

The entrance to the school was guarded by the Ossetian OMON.² They would only let rescue workers and investigators from the Prosecutor's Office enter. Police big shots, barked at them trying to get through, but each time they would back up after a short conversation in Ossetian. Among themselves the OMON were speaking Russian.

According to the OMON, the first shots and explosions had caught everyone by surprise. Allegedly, some gunmen hatched a plan to lure workers from the Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Disaster Relief into the school under pretext of removing dead bodies, and then kill them, put on their uniforms, and escape in their car. But there was a quarrel between those who wanted to escape and those who wanted to stay and die for the cause along with the hostages. The quarrel led to a shoot out, and the homemade bombs hanging around the gymnasium, hit by stray bullets, exploded. The hostages started to flee the building and the situation got out of control.³

Meanwhile, they started admitting more people into the school. The first was Arsen Fadzaev, a Duma deputy. He was accompanied by numerous assistants, some of them self-appointed, I think. Then Andrei Fursenko, the minister of education, arrived in a red Mitsubishi Pajero. He came out half an hour later with such a look on his face that I did not dare approach him. I caught up with him in the evening. His speech was disorganized: "Afterwards, I went to the hospital. There are wounded children there. Have you been there? We must do everything for them, at least something.... Do you know the old parable about the starfish? There was a storm and a lot of starfish were been beached. An old man was walking around collecting them. They asked him why he was doing that – there were thousands of starfish. He said that something should be done at

² OMON, a special-purpose police force.

³ At this moment, two years after Beslan, there is still no detailed, coherent, substantiated official account of the events. The commission within the State Duma that has been investigating the tragedy continues to postpone issuing its findings. In an unofficial version, events were triggered by federal troops firing one or more incendiary, rocket-propelled grenades into the roof of the gymnasium.

least for a single one. Perhaps it is not a good example. Anyhow, I want to explain that we should try the best we can for them, for everybody. We have a rehabilitation center; we are becoming experts in this kind of things, unfortunately.”

The rescue workers continue carrying out bodies. They are dressed variously: some in blue uniforms and white helmets and wearing respirators, others in T-shirts of various colors with their faces swathed in towels. The smell reached us too.

A flaxen-haired OMON soldier emerged from the gymnasium. Returning to his place in the cordon, he addressed his comrades: “See, guys, there is a sword lying there. I wonder what they used it for? They just found an unexploded grenade. There are many of them.” He said there were places in the school that the rescue workers had not reached yet.

I asked him: “Do you know what the people outside the cordon are saying? They think they are being kept out because there is still somebody in the basement.”

“No, for an hour and a half already there has been nobody left there. Everybody has been packed up and carried out.”

Two rescue workers came out of an ambulance. One had his hand bandaged, and another – his head. They went behind the cordon, but in a few minutes they came out running. They were chased by another rescue worker.

“I’ll put you to bed! Yesterday you were lying unconscious, and today you are back! Stop!”

But the injured had already disappeared into a neighboring garage. Then I saw Anzor Margiev, the uncle of the missing Elvira. He came by the same shortcut I had used earlier. He was 50 meters away from the gymnasium and he intended to make it there. I told him that it was probably too late. Many had been carried out already and put into the refrigerator trucks. The first truck had already left and second was about to depart. He looked at the truck with anguish.

“How will we find her now? Do you know where the truck is going?” Anzor asked a soldier standing in the cordon. “Where it should go,” responded the soldier, looking as if he had said more than he was allowed to say.

Prosecutor disgraced

Beslan residents and journalists filled the square before the cultural center. The meeting with the authorities was to have begun a quarter of an hour ago. “What is this? What did

you come for? To take our pictures?” the Ossetians shouted, as the journalists photographed them frantically from above, from the steps of the cultural center.

“Take away your cameras, or we will smash them! It is because of you that the gunmen went crazy. Why have you said there were 354 people in the school when there were more than a thousand? Because of you the gunmen told the hostages that if they say there are 354 people, so be it, and no more will be left. Get out of here!”

“Is nobody coming to meet with us?” a young Ossetian woman asked quietly. “Are they out of their minds?” In her hands she held a school notebook with a large picture of her ten-year-old daughter inserted between the pages.

At that moment, the crowd swung in the direction of the cordon. A woman gave a heart-rending cry, then another. “Somebody there got crashed!” a voice nearby said sorrowfully.

The people moved right up to the cordon and stopped. On the ground an old Ossetian woman sat with her eyes closed, holding her head with her hands. She moaned and swung from side to side. Her face was white and covered with large beads of sweat. “Three of her grandchildren have perished in the school, and the fourth is missing,” people in the crowd were saying. “She has been waiting to hear where the missing one is. Looks like she has no more strength to wait.”

Two other women began crying loudly. They were carried out of the crowd and placed on wooden boxes. Not one of those for whom the crowd was waiting had appeared on the steps of the cultural center. But the people would not leave, as if they waited for a miracle. For the last three days, they had become accustomed to waiting for a miracle on this same spot. And the miracle did happen: in the afternoon the prosecutor for North Ossetia, Alexander Bigulov, appeared.

“Examination of the scene of the incident continues on the premises of the school,” he said standing on steps of the cultural center. “Measures of the field investigation character are being taken.”

“Fuck you!” came a shout from the crowd. “These are our children there!”

The prosecutor pretended he did not hear. “Entering the school premises is prohibited. The list of dead and wounded is being verified. This is all I am competent to tell you,” said the prosecutor and began descending the steps.

“Scoundrel!” came shouts from the crowd below, but no one laid a hand on him while he was making his way through the crowd.

“My daughter is missing!” shouted a woman. “How I can find her? How can we all find them?”

“Come see me, we’ll talk,” the prosecutor responded over his shoulder.

“You have a phone number, you, bastard?” moaned the woman, but he did not turn.

The prosecutor came out of the crowd. He addressed one of his assistants, “Do we have any water? Cold water.”

“Not cold, I am afraid,” the assistant sounding distressed.

“Too bad,” the prosecutor shook his head, “I’ve been standing over there like a fucking idiot.”

Information to the top

I used my proven shortcut to get back to the school. Heavy machinery was already at work. There were more people in the schoolyard. I joined a group of people in civilian clothing approaching the entrance (they paid no attention to me) and got through the gate without trouble.

An excavator was collecting the debris brought out of the gymnasium. The inside of the gymnasium looked more or less cleaned up. Charred floorboards. Gym ladders hanging on the walls scarred by shell fragments. Burned basketball baskets and some basketballs that had survived. The gymnasium looked small, strikingly small. I couldn’t understand how more than a thousand people had survived three days in there.

The smell was unbearable. Rescue workers, as if unbothered by it, were steadily clearing the assembly hall and the school cafeteria. They thought there could be people there as well. Another refrigerator truck came into the yard, and they began loading it with the bodies that remained on the asphalt pavement. Many of the black bags only looked large; workers were lifting them effortlessly. Those were bodies of children.

About 50 meters away, behind a small attachment to the school building, on the side facing the railway tracks, the bodies of the gunmen lay on the asphalt pavement. Most of them were bagged, but heads of two of the corpses had been left exposed. One had a 10-ruble note stuffed in his mouth. Another gunman had nowhere to stuff anything: half of his head was missing. Rescue workers passed the corpses with indifference. The Ossetians, the Prosecutor’s Office staff and soldiers from the cordon spit on them. Some others stayed and looked at the corpses long and hard, as if committing them to memory.

At some point, the prosecutor's staff led two men to the corpses. One was slim and short, dressed in remarkably clean jeans and a T-shirt; the other was tall, wearing a dirty, tattered sports suit. They had T-shirts on their heads, covering their faces, with eyeholes cut in them. Policemen held them by the arms.

The prosecutor's staff began the identification procedure. Both men started whispering agitatedly into the investigators' ears, pointing to the corpses, as if they were afraid to be overheard.

Suddenly we heard a piercing scream coming from the crowd standing on the railroad embankment, on the other side of the cordon. "Give them to us!" The investigator looked at the prisoners and shook his head no, with regret I thought.

"Give them to us!" came the shout again. "I cannot!" the investigator shouted back. The prisoners were taken away.

About 30 meters from the entrance to the gymnasium, belongings of the gunmen were piled on the ground. A Gazel minibus with Office of the Prosecutor of the Russia Federation written on it stood nearby. An investigator fished a Snickers bar, then a fat little book from a large backpack.

"OK, write it down: a blue-covered book with Arabic inscription. And what are these balls?" The investigator took out a small pack of gold-tinted balls. "Some kind of ecstasy? OK, we'll find out. Well, they got ... stocked up." Another load of gunmen's belongings (How did they manage to sort them out so quickly?), a stretcher full of them, was brought and dumped nearby. The investigator looked at the new pile with loathing.

A few of his colleagues were sitting on the grass, about 10 meters away. As I watched them, they were brought a couple of chairs. "OK, let's count," said one. "We need to get information to the top, to the very top."

"No problem. As of this moment, everything is clear: 224, plus those 18 who were thrown out the window – they've been laid out separately, plus yesterday's 79. How many altogether, 328? And there are four bags of body parts."

"No, 321. But there are more bodies in the hospitals, plus 28 of those scoundrels."

"No, 26 scoundrels. And we don't plus them. But there were 18 of those thrown out, not 21, I think."

"Urgently verify the number of the thrown out! 18? And did you count the gunmen together with their broads?"

“Together, of course.”

“OK, that is all for now. Call upstairs!”

“But we still don’t know how many there are in the hospital morgues.”

“It’s not our business. Do it, call!”

At that moment a rescue worker approached them: “Another gunman has been found.”

“Take him away.” But the gunman was already being taken on a stretcher to join his comrades in arms on the asphalt pavement. A crowd of rescue workers and investigators gathered around him. I thought of joining them but changed my mind. I was more interested in the conversation that the people on the grass were having.

“They say some guys got away?” asked one of the investigators.

“That’s right,” answered another. “They took off their black overalls, and they had civilian clothes under them. But they could not get far, I hope. They don’t know the area.”

“They could have taken a taxi,” said another investigator.

“A taxi? Carrying weapons! Well, I suppose they could.”

“Does anybody know if they had accomplices and where? The word is that the cop whom they brought with them in the car was in cahoots with them. He was escorting them.”

At that point they finally noticed me and I had to leave.

Emergency helplessness

In the evening the list of wounded was finally posted on the wall of the cultural center. The people studied it intently, rereading it many times over, and even when it became dark they continued peering at the list. Just in case, they put a woman physician in a chair next to it. It looked to me like the woman was in danger of going to sleep and slipping off the chair.

“Is there anything that can be done to help them now?” I asked her.

“Well, at least they can pump them full of drugs. That would help for a while.”

“And then?”

“Then they will come to, eventually, anyway.” She closed her eyes.

“Listen,” I told her, “I think you need help too.”

“Yes,” she agreed tiredly. “And you don’t? Everybody does.”

Death water

The next day Beslan held its first funerals. I walked through the town in the morning as if I was walking through a cemetery. It seemed I heard weeping coming from every house.

The school was very quiet. It has been open to all since yesterday. At the center of the gymnasium, candles and opened two-liter bottles of mineral water, five bottles altogether, were placed on chairs. There was water in several disposable plastic cups. Next to them, someone had laid a child’s toy, a stuffed yellow elephant with raised trunk. Flowers everywhere – on windowsills, in classrooms, in corridors. Many women’s shoes and children’s sandals also lay on the windowsills. There was dead silence. People were even afraid to shuffle their feet.

Two staircases at opposite ends of the building lead to the second floor. The school building is large. The classrooms are littered with notebooks, books, textbooks, smashed tape-recorders and disks. The plaque hanging on the wall of the Russian Language and the Nature Studies room reads: alarm signal – four bells. Evacuate the room immediately, rooms 1,2,3,4. On another wall, a map, the Industrial Map of the USSR, 1928-1978. Globes stood on the windowsill poked by bullets and flowers and children toys.

In another room I saw a board of fame – ten photographs of children, ages seven to about 14, under the title Smart Boys and Smart Girls. Four photographs were missing, and flowers were heaped under the board. I realize that the missing photographs were of those who survived.

Rain starts and quickly turns into a downpour. I thought of the candles in the gymnasium that would go out because the gymnasium has no roof. As it turned out, people held umbrellas above the candles.

The neighboring gym, the commercial one that Anzor had told me about, is very small. There were weights and dumbbells on the floor and overturned training machines. As

Anzor had said, there was a breach in the wall, not a large one, but large enough to squeeze through. The wall was five bricks thick.

In the adjacent toilet, the faucet in the sink was running and the floor was swimming in water. I could have closed the faucet, but I realized that anybody could have done so. Nobody did. The faucet had been left running for the same reason that the bottles with mineral water had been put on the chairs.

Andrei Kolesnikov (Moscow) Cemetery № 1



Kommersant, September 7, 2004

Yesterday 162 people who died in the terrorist attack were buried in Beslan. The country's leadership wanted to meet with the people at the cemetery, to give them support in that difficult hour. But they changed their minds. Andrei Kolesnikov, a special correspondent for the newspaper *Kommersant*, reports from Beslan.

I FEEL like I have passed to the other world. There is silence this morning outside every house in Beslan; there are coffins and people in black. I walk the town and see the same on every street: silence and coffins. Long tents hang on metal poles over asphalt-paved streets. A car could drive under them. When the people come back from the cemetery, tables and benches will be set out beneath them for the wakes.

I am standing by Albina Tsokaeva's house. Albina would have been 12 in seven days. She died from two bullets in her forehead and a shell fragment in her mouth. She lies in an open coffin nevertheless, because everybody wanted to say his or her last farewells. Her father is moving back and forth between two huge vats in which meat is cooking. Earlier in the morning the relatives sacrificed two calves. The house is at a loss to help the relatives with funeral preparations. Usually neighbors do this; they would not let the family do any work. But the neighbors have funerals of their own. They also have people in their house who came to relieve them of chores.

Beside me, Albina's father's cousin stands. He is from Gelendzhik. This summer another Beslan girl, his niece Zalina Albegova, visited with him. A week before her return to Beslan she got a tattoo of the sun on her shoulder. Had she consulted her uncle, he would not have let her. But after seeing the tattoo he decided that the sun is all right, and besides the girl told him the tattoo would be gone in two weeks. She agreed nevertheless not to tell her mother about the tattoo: when it's gone, it's gone.

For several days now, they pin all their hopes on the tattoo. On September 1 Zalina went to School № 1. Later, she was not found among the living nor dead. She is missing. Russian has visited every morgue and hospital, and more than once, but she is nowhere.

"I went through all the body parts," he says softly, standing 30 meters from Albina's coffin. "We would have recognized her by her teeth, by her tattoo. But she is nowhere. And how many people could be put together from those body parts? We, the relatives, came together, pondered. Thirty? Not more than 40, for sure. But we were told there

are 250 missing. Where are our children?” He looked around to make sure that nobody is eavesdropping, nobody who should not be in the know. “There is a hypothesis. People saw our Zalina being thrown out of the window by the gunmen. But she was not found on the ground. Where is she?” He looks at me hard. I don’t say anything, because I don’t understand what he is driving at.

“The word is that those animals took our children with them. Not everybody, of course. But some have been taken away. Because they had to do something for protection.”

“And where do you think the children are?”

“They could have been thrown out of the car on the way. Think for yourself. Why would they need the extra load? And the children are in shock and just don’t know where to go. Or they could have taken them all the way, to keep. But the main thing – they are alive. Understand? We will find them, anyway. Will you help us? Will you publish their pictures?”

On the table by the vats with meat there are Ossetian pies. “Do you know our customs?” asks a tall, old Ossetian man. “Two pies on the table are for grief, three for jubilation. Meat is cut differently for funerals and for weddings. If it is a funeral, then the cuts are large. Anyway, there are many subtleties; you don’t have to know them all. For example, Alexander Sergeevich visited us and understood nothing at all.”

“Alexander who? Does he have a surname?”

“That was Pushkin, the poet. He wrote it up afterward in detail. Men were standing, waving their hands, crying, but he did not understand what the matter was. In fact, there was simply a coffin in the house. Just like now, the women are sitting in the house with Albina.

“And where is her mother?” I asked.

“She is in the hospital,” Ruslan explains. “She was in the gymnasium with Albina, and she covered her with her body when the explosion happened. A ceiling block fell on her and broke her ribs and spine. It hurts her too much to talk because her lungs are punctured, but there is a question in her eyes: how is Albina? We wanted to tell her, but the doctors said that if you want to lose her, too, go ahead, tell.”

“When did the lads go to dig the grave?” a young Ossetian asked Ruslan.

“They went early in the morning. Everything should be ready by now.” He turned to me again,

“Do you know how we do graves? They are like houses. We line them with pointed brickwork with colored joints.”

We are joined by an old man, who points and says, “See that man walking? See him? He is looking for his daughter. You know what happened? A terrible thing. He brought his daughter out of the gymnasium and put her in a white Chevrolet. Then he ran to save others. Now for three days, he cannot find her. She was alive, she talked to him. Where can she be?”

A man in fatigues brings a mid-size leather case, puts it on the table, and takes several rolled up notebooks out of his trousers pocket. He begins collecting money, putting the donors’ names in the notebook. Some give fifty rubles, other a thousand.

“Do you think there will be too few people at the funeral?” Ruslan asks his neighbor. “I know there are more coming, but it seems like everybody in Beslan is having funerals and everyone has to be somewhere. Had we been the only ones, there would have been many more people.”

But many have come and more are coming. They will stand silently before Albina’s father and grandfather, and then they will embrace them and step aside to let others take their place.

Even today these people are remarkably openhearted. Another Ossetian begins telling me that Albina’s grandfather is a hero. “He is a hero not because he fought in the war and was a war prisoner in Italy, but because he did not shed a tear when his oldest son died. And today he is a hero too. His granddaughter has died and he weeps all the time. See, he is in tears right now. But he is holding up, he has not died.” I was told in; a respectful whisper.

When the number of mourners reached about 200 by my estimate, the coffin was brought out of the house and the farewell began. The women wept loudly, but the men wept too. One of the relatives gave a short speech in Ossetian.

“What did he say?” I asked. “He thanked everybody for coming. No politics,” the man standing next to me answered and gave me a compassionate look.

Afterward, there was more leave-taking of the girl. Then, following the coffin, we went to the main street. We passed School № 1, but nobody even glanced in that direction. For these people, it has ceased to exist. We took Albina to the cemetery.

Two five-storey apartment buildings stand next to the school. They share a yard. Yester-

day farewells for six people were held in this yard – for two adults and four children. It was raining. People were standing under the tents, the same kind of tents put up next to Albina's house, and in the rain. There was not enough space under the tents for everyone. The women cried, embracing coffins with their arms. One of them lost consciousness and was dragged under the tent. I wondered why there was not a single ambulance or a doctor present. That day I did not see a single doctor in Beslan. All of them had been dispatched to wait at the cemetery.

They put a wet handkerchief on the woman's forehead, rubbed her fingers, brought her three glasses of water. There was nothing else they could do for her.

Here in the yard, they also make farewells and short speeches in Ossetian. Then they take the coffins to the cars.

The streets are already jammed with people, cars and coffins. The coffins swim on raised hands over hoods of cars and over people's heads. It looks like chaos had begun and people no longer understand where they are to go and what they are supposed to do. The coffins cannot be brought through the jammed streets to the cars waiting to take them to the cemetery. There is nobody to take charge and bring order. It is as if nobody knew beforehand that today there will be many funerals in Beslan and that many relatives and friends of the deceased, and even people not in anyway related to them, would come to the town.

Those who carry the coffins stop in indecision. They heed shouts that they should turn, and they turn crying, and stop again. And those who shout spread their arms in gestures of helplessness and also cry helplessly. And all the time, more and more coffins are being brought out of the yards into the streets.

I made it to the cemetery on foot. It is about half a kilometer from the town and the only cemetery in Beslan. This half a kilometer takes you along the Rostov-Vladikavkaz federal highway. Traffic on the highway is usually heavy, but yesterday I saw mostly people and coffins carried on raised hands or loaded on cars. Everybody, as is the custom, went to bury their dead at the same hour.

There is a large piece of wasteland adjacent to the cemetery, and this is where the graves have been dug. By the time I arrived, the large field was already dotted with freshly dug graves and people standing around them. The unrelenting rain had turned to torrents. But the mourners were not bothered by the rain. Most of the coffins were closed and nothing else merited their attention.

There was no music. There was an orchestra following one of the coffins, but it stopped playing the moment it entered the wasteland. The people cried and lowered their chil-

dren into the graves lined with pointer brickwork, and covered the graves with metal sheets or slabs of concrete. Moans and crying filled the air above the wasteland.

In an hour the flow of people leaving the cemetery became larger than the flow of those arriving. I, too, was about to leave. The rain was so heavy that I could hardly see anything. And then I heard somebody say to somebody else, “Who are those guys up there?”

I looked around me and was shocked. I had not noticed the podium because of the rain. It appeared out of nowhere, like in a movie. I stepped back when lifting my eyes and saw it standing 20 meters away on the left. The podium was draped in black and bound with a red ribbon. Standing on the podium right in front of me, I saw a man resembling the prosecutor general. He held an umbrella. My first thought was what an uncanny resemblance. But then, I looked at those standing next to him and it became clear that this was indeed the prosecutor general himself. Next to him stood the speaker of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, the chairman of the Federation Council, Sergei Mironov, the head of the President’s Administration, Dmitry Medvedev, the President’s Representative for the Southern Federal District, Vladimir Yakovlev, the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, the governor of St. Petersburg, Valentina Matvienko, and the president of North Ossetia, Alexander Dzasokhov. Only the cabinet ministers and the president were missing, and since Putin had already visited Beslan, he did not have to be there.

A famous Ossetian poet whose name I have forgotten was also standing on the podium and had just begun the opening speech. President Dzasokhov spoke next, “We will search for those who did it and for those who directed them, but until we have found them we should remain together and should keep ourselves under control.”

Yuri Luzhkov explained that those who did it cannot be called animals, because they are non-humans who have raised their hand against children, and that “we, Muscovites, perhaps understand your pain better than others, because we experienced the terrorist attack on *Nord-Ost* and lost there those whom we should have protected. We have had apartment buildings blown up while people slept in them. We feel your pain and we understand that their goal is to create panic. But we in Moscow did not succumb. We came together and did not blame each other, but stood united against the evil that came into our Universe...” This last was a theme to which he returned several times.

I understood how important it was to make the people – those who were shoveling the earth beneath him, not a hundred meters away, and paid him no attention – understand that revenge is not theirs to take and that they should calm down.

The Beslanians paid almost no attention to those standing on the podium. Around the podium was the security service, journalists and about sixty people who, like me, were going back to town and noticed the podium by chance and stopped to listen.

Mr. Gryzlov told the audience that most of the country could not imagine such a tragedy. This led me to entertain the idea that Mr. Gryzlov believed that there was a minority that could imagine the possibility. He asserted that “today our country is crossed by a front line,” and I agreed with him. “But the truth,” said Mr. Gryzlov, “should be defended both on the ground and in the air, in the mountains and on the plain. This is the moment when it would be appropriate to recall the words of the president of Russia that providing security is a matter all society should be concerned with, that...” Again, as at the instant I first saw the podium, I began to doubt the reality of what was happening.

Then the meeting was declared over, and the participants descended the podium. Remarkably, nobody but journalists approached them. The people needed nothing from them. Nobody expected anything of them. They did not even expect them to approach the graves of the Beslan cemetery. I realized that these people who flew all the way from Moscow to Beslan for a mourning rally were simply not needed here by anybody.

I kept asking myself, Why? Why didn't they stop by the graves? Even just to lay flowers. They were there anyway, so why not approach. One lone Orthodox priest, after stepping down from the podium, squished through the mud to the graves.

Later they told me themselves why they did not. First, for security reasons. They wanted to very much, but were not allowed to. “And then there was the mud,” they told me. “You saw it yourself; it was raining cats and dogs.”

Igor Naidenov (Moscow) Beslan Syndrome



Izvestia, August 28, 2005

Part 1. Envy

BESLAN one year later. This town has been wearing mourning garb for its dead children and balancing on the edge of sanity for an entire year. Every day, it envied and hated. A year after the tragedy, Beslan is a divided town. The townspeople are divided into those who want revenge and those who have resigned themselves to their loss, those who have received financial compensation for their dead and those who are counting other people's money.

Life in Beslan today is ruled by hatred and envy; there is some compassion, although it is harder to find than the hatred and envy.

“A pity my children and I were not at the school during the hostage taking.”

The students of School № 1 who survived have been transferred to School № 6 in hopes that mingling with more fortunate children will help relieve them of stress. As a result, School № 6 students have become stressed. Which of the two is more fortunate? Not every Beslan resident would give an unqualified answer to this question.

Trips abroad and monetary compensation fell upon the children and their parents with the compassion of an avalanche. If it did not make them enemies of Beslan's other residents, it certainly provoked envy and resentment. Imagine, some children are leaving for vacations in Canada, while others go to their parents' *dachas* to water the vegetables. One gets an Italian racing bicycle from a UNESCO agency, or is it NATO, while the other must sell watermelons at the market throughout the summer vacation to buy a bike. Add to that the special treatment the survivors got in school all last year. Where the average ignoramus gets a C, the teacher would try and find an excuse to give the former hostage a B. However you explain psychological trauma to the other children, they will still see an injustice.

“These trips just add to the children's trauma and create free-riding attitudes,” Elena Rubaeva, a psychologist at the Red Cross's We are Together center, fumes. “First they show them the good life overseas, and the moment the children have become accustomed to it they take them back, back to memories of blood and death, to a town in the grip of stress.”

Teenage boys are hanging around the ruins of School № 1, waiting, it seems, for the journalists to push them for an anniversary tale “about those events.” Sasha is about 12, he briskly, one might say professionally, tells me about the terrorists, their number and weapons. He is following the trial of Nurpashi Kulaev, the only captured terrorist. He casually drops a few words about his trip abroad this summer, something like “Once, when I was walking on the Champs Elysees...”

He has a well-groomed Staffordshire terrier on a designer leash and not a worry in his eyes. On September 3 he got out of the school unscathed. He got lucky.

At a parents’ conference at School № 6, the mother of a student dropped in anger, “A pity my children and I were not at the school during the hostage taking.” Few defended her, but many understood.

Wrong money

“In North Ossetia, you cannot get a job without paying money to the right people. Where would a single mother get a job?” ask Murat Bolotaev, a local taxi driver. The terrorist attack on School № 1 has solved that problem for some single moms.

No victim of a terrorist attack, nor the relatives of a victim, ever received compensations this large in Russia. Not after the Moscow apartment buildings had been blown up, not after the *Nord-Ost* tragedy. Never. Here in Beslan compensation was one million rubles (*about \$38,000*) for each fatality, 700,000 rubles to a heavily wounded victim, 500,000 rubles for an injury of medium severity, 350,000 rubles to a lightly wounded victim. Hostages and their relatives received additional lump sum payments. So, no one received less than 400,000 rubles, even hostages who escaped injuries. Official data report that about one billion rubles has been transferred to the accounts of Beslan residents, and without major delays.

Beslan was not exactly an impoverished town before the terrorist attack. In comparison with the rest of North Ossetia, it was doing well. In Soviet times, its prosperity was based on a large corn mill and an animal-food processing plant. After Perestroika, on a multitude of alcohol producing enterprises – some legal, some not exactly. But since victims of the tragedy began receiving compensation, the quiet prosperity of the vodka and wine town has come to an end.

Former hostages began putting money into improving their living conditions: they purchased apartments or renovated their houses. As a result, the housing market has soared. The price of a three-room apartment was 700,000 rubles before the terrorist attack. After compensation payments, it almost doubled. It is not hard to imagine what

those who had saved for years to buy an apartment in Beslan were saying about the victims of the attack.

Beslan is a small town. It has about 30,000 inhabitants; everyone knows everyone and everyone's business. You can't hide a new double-pane insulated window from a neighbor, even behind the traditional, high Caucasian wall protecting a house.

The sudden wealth (a million rubles is a lot of money even for a well-to-do individual in Beslan) that fell into the laps of former hostages has inflamed covert hostility of native Beslan residents toward newcomers, especially toward Ossetians who have immigrated from Georgia in the last few years.

"First these penniless newcomers swamped us, and now they have built themselves palaces!" yells old Juliet in answer to my question about compensation and then points in the direction of a well-dressed woman. Quite possibly, the woman was never a hostage and did not buy her dress with compensation money, but it does not make any difference: her money is "wrong money."

Wrong money is the main subject of conversation in Beslan. A popular topic is cars bought with it. There are many new cars in Beslan. "A thousand cars or even more," rumor has it. "Look at them," say Beslan men, "they never sat in a cart and now they are driving foreign cars," This thousand cars has deprived the townspeople of peace of mind. They discuss it at home, on the job, in the bus. "How could they? It has not been a year since their children died, but they are already buying themselves cars."

The visitor, without fail, is treated to a horror story about a local junky who received compensation for relatives who were killed, bought a car and drove it under a truck coming from the opposite direction. The truck tore away the roof of the car along with his head, which was found a hundred meters from the scene. "Nine of these cars have already crashed." The story has a moral: this is how God punishes those who get rich on the blood of their relatives!

Other residents, former hostages and relatives of those who died at School № 1, respond, "If buying a new car and driving it will make men who have lost their children feel better, let them buy cars and enjoy them. It is better than drinking or hanging themselves. Who could blame them?"

"Not a bad deal: they will have the new children and the money for the children they have lost."

Nowadays, denouncing former hostages and their relatives is considered a decent act in Beslan, and this is what is most indecent about the situation there. They are denounced in the name of morality.

Some of the women who lost their children to the terrorist attack are now pregnant. “They shouldn’t have!” says a nurse from the local outpatient clinic.

“Why not?”

“Too soon, it is indecent. They need to suffer more.”

“But these women are over 40; they don’t have time for suffering, or they will never have children.”

“Doesn’t matter; they shouldn’t have!”

All who died in the terrorist attack have been buried together, next to the old cemetery. They are separated from the old cemetery by a fence. I wish the survivors were separated as well by a fence to protect them from their neighbors’ envy.

Beslan men are more tolerant of the hurried pregnancies of women who lost their children. But to raise the subject with a Beslan woman unaffected by the tragedy is to risk hearing a comment like, “Not a bad deal: they will have the new children and the money for the children they have lost.”

Beslan makes the impression of a not-quite-sane place. Everyone blames everyone and no one has pity for anyone. This is sad and hard to explain to an outsider. Perhaps, it comes from collective stress.

Women are divided into those who stopped wearing black on the fortieth day after the funeral and those who will be wearing mourning grab until a year passes. The former accuse the latter of overstating their grief and of unnecessary pathos. The latter accuse the former of lack of adequate respect for tradition and of excessive worldliness.

“How long can one wear black and make a show of grief? You’d think they are the only ones who lost their children,” grumbles an old woman at the cemetery for the victims of the terrorist act. She has flown in from Moscow to visit the grave of her grandson. Among the ritual dresses and tightly tied black headscarves, the pleats on her bosom look like a dare.

The women from Mothers of Beslan suspect the North Ossetian government of sending children in no way connected with Beslan nor with School №1 on sponsored tours abroad. “You need only compare the list of hostages with the list of those who have traveled abroad,” says Emiliya Bzarova. Her son Aslan was killed and another, Zaur, wounded. It took almost a month to find Aslan’s remains, so she will stop wearing black

only at the end of September, when a year has passed since the funeral. That somebody from the category “never knew suffering” should enjoy a sponsored trip abroad, which is the exclusive right of her child, makes her very angry.

Vladikavkaz¹ officials publicly deny including “outsiders” in the sponsored tours. Off the record, however, they offer an excuse: “There are so many who want to invite the children. Where do we get enough of them to fill all the requests?”

Staff from the Department of Education grumbles about foreigners who, under the guise of charitable work, do make-work to spend grant money. One of them told me about a trip to Germany for 250 children from Beslan. “They were shown a brick factory and a farm, and that was all in the way of guided tours. They made the children clean their rooms themselves at the hotel. It is time these people leave us alone.” She produces a long list of organizations, mostly foreign, operating rehabilitation programs in Beslan.

Artificial insemination, cloning, adoption, resurrection...

Many of the women, especially observing the one-year mourning, reproach the Beslan men for not having taken revenge for the deaths of their children. Revenge is a Caucasian tradition: an eye for an eye. They dismissively call them “wimpy studs.”² Some say that many of the women who were hostages refuse, therefore, to sleep with their husbands and that their number is growing. These assertions are impossible to verify, for obvious reasons, but some time ago the Ossetian Ministry of Health recommended that Beslan psychologists offer artificial insemination to women who lost children in the hostage crisis. They should receive this help in a Moscow clinic on a priority basis and free of charge.

“It is unprofessional and irresponsible,” the psychologists say, “to suggest this to women in stress, who are not yet ready to adequately process important information. The officials say artificial insemination would facilitate their rehabilitation. But if insemination fails to achieve results, imagine how it will exacerbate their psychological wounds.”

About a year ago, *Izvestia* (November 26, 2004) published an article about charlatans who were offering to resurrect the children of Beslan women – 39,000 rubles per child. Now, a year later, the subject of resurrection competes in popularity here with the subject of monetary compensation.

Alla, a Beslan woman, is obsessed with the idea of cloning her dead child. They say she is going to spend her compensation money on it and has gotten in touch with universities abroad involved with cloning experiments.

¹ The capital of North Ossetia.

² In the original “muzhchinki,” which is men with a diminutive suffix. Usually signifies men with no manly qualities other than sexual ones.

There is another woman who, having identified the remains of her daughter and having buried them, still comes out each evening to the yard and waits for her to come home.

The Turaev family lost two children, a boy and a girl. They decided to have a baby, but the wife could not conceive. One day they found a newborn left at their door. First, in confusion, they took the baby to the police, but three days later they came to their senses: this is a gift from God! They took the baby back. It is said that they could not be happier with their new child. Christmas stories do happen, even in hell.

School № 1, the trademark

Nor is there peace between teachers and parents of School № 1. By the beginning of the new academic year, two new schools had been built in Beslan; each accommodates 600 students. The teachers want one of them given the number one, and they want to put all the students of the former School № 1 into it. The parents are against this. They argue that № 1 should be eliminated, so as not to traumatize the children, and that the children should be able to choose freely which of the two new schools they would like to attend.

“This is just a superstition,” Zarema Buralova, head of the district Department of Education, commented two weeks ago. Nonetheless, indications are that education officials will side with the parents. The two new schools, on Lenin Street and on Comintern Street, will be given numbers 8 and 9.

The local administration told us that superstition has nothing to do with it: Teachers have been fighting to keep School №1 as a brand name to assure preferential treatment for humanitarian aid “which will be arriving addressed to School №1, especially from abroad, for a long time to come.”

Beslan residents have had their say in the fate of what is left of School №1: the ruins are to be razed as soon as the investigation is over and a church is to be built on the spot; the gymnasium is to be left standing as a memorial. The residents’ decision is going through approval within the town administration.

The clinical picture of the Beslan malady is, if anything, getting worse with time. Victims of the terrorist attack are looking for ways to atone for the guilt of sudden enrichment. Some give part of their compensation money to orphanages. The household of the Totiev brothers has chosen another way of atonement. The family lost six children, a boy and five girls; they have the largest common grave in the cemetery and nothing to be ashamed of. They are paving the street where their house stands, paving it for the benefit of everybody. Their motives could very well be noble. But their neighbors are busy doing arithmetic in their heads: they multiply one million by six all the time.

Beslan Syndrome

Izvestia, August 29, 2005

Part 2. Obsession

Izvestia continues its series of articles on the psychological traumas that Beslan is living with today, a year after the tragedy

ONE of the manifestations of Beslan Syndrome is obsessive behavior exhibited by mothers who lost their children. Whether obsessive behavior should be used here as a medical or a conversational term, does not make much difference.

Mothers of Beslan has become a socio-political phenomenon. This organization cannot be outlawed. Its rallies cannot be dispersed. Mothers of Beslan cannot be bought and cannot be silenced. One could try to discredit them or to ignore them, but neither has worked so far.

“We are not afraid of anybody, and the authorities know that.”

For the past six months, that is, from the moment of its inception, Mothers of Beslan has been pressing for a meeting with Russia’s president. They want to tell the president what they think was wrong with the official investigation of the terrorist attack. Moscow, however, has never answered. Then, a week before the events dedicated to the first anniversary of the tragedy of September 2004, the government of North Ossetia transmitted an invitation from President Putin to Mothers of Beslan to meet with him in the Kremlin on September 2. This placed the Beslan women in a dilemma: to spend this grievous anniversary by the graves of their children or with the president.

Mothers of Beslan has planned a series of public actions to coincide with the anniversary. Sussana Dudueva, head of the committee, informed *Izvestia* of its plans as early as mid-August. For the authorities, there was no better way to neutralize its most vociferous critics than to have them invited to the Kremlin on these days. If Mothers of Beslan were to accept the invitation and leave for Moscow, the commemoration would proceed according to the official scenario: solemnly and without politically damaging excess. If the women refuse the invitation and organize public disturbances in Beslan, they could be accused of unwillingness to engage in civilized dialogue.

Mothers of Beslan is a thorn in the side of the authorities. At the trial of Nurpashi Kulaev, the only surviving terrorist, investigators say they ask embarrassing questions: about the real number of hostages and terrorists, about the non-conventional weapons used, about clumsy actions from operation’s headquarters. They demand that top

government officials, including the president, answer for allowing the terrorist attack to happen and that the measure of responsibility each one bears be determined. They cannot be dispersed by police batons, because no one beats women in the Caucasus. A decree of the Ministry of Justice cannot outlaw them, because they are victims of the incompetence of the authorities and public opinion will be always on their side. Mothers of Beslan cannot be wiped out – but it can be discredited.

“At some point, leaflets were distributed all over North Ossetia. In them I was called a devil, a black woman, a witch,” say Susanna Dudieva. “They wrote that I bring troubles wherever I go. Rumors are always circulating that the opposition is using our committee to bring down the republic’s government. They say I was given ... let me think what was it ... yes, an apartment in Moscow, two apartments and a shop in Vladikavkaz, a hotel in Rostov ... and something else. But they did not write that my son died in the terrorist attack. They thought we would drop everything and start investigating who had concocted this lies. But we have more important things to do. The main thing is to ensure objective investigation of the events.”

“You are not concerned with your reputation then?”

“We don’t care about reputation. There can be nothing worse than what has already happened to us. We are not afraid of anybody, and the authorities know that. Zalina (she nods in the direction of one of the committee activists) lost her whole family. Emma (she nods in another direction) lost her family: her husband and two sons. There are women who lost three or four children. What else do they have to lose? The people who know no better, they think that a new car or an apartment could make a mother forget her dead child. No money can buy us. Though I can tell you I was never offered any. (She laughs somewhat artificially.) Nevertheless, the heads of enforcement agencies, the Prosecutor’s Office, the authorities do try to clamp our mouths.”

“We need to form a women’s battalion, if the men cannot take revenge.”

We talk with Susanna Dudieva at the office of the Mothers of Beslan committee. Perhaps office is too grand a word. This is actually a small apartment in a Khrushchevka building.³ This ground floor apartment with street entrance and a door open wide all day belongs to one of the Beslan mothers. It is furnished with a table, chairs and some office equipment. Mobile phones ring incessantly. It brings to mind revolution headquarters on the eve of uprising. Every one of the mothers there is busy.

³ Khrushchevka, a low-quality, standard-design apartment building, erected throughout the country to fulfill Nikita Khrushchev’s state housing program.

One sends an e-mail, “Does anybody know the address of the President’s Administration? I have forgotten.”

Another calls the office of the President’s Representative in the Southern Federal District, Dmitry Kozak. “Kozak is on scheduled vacation leave,” she announces loudly and with venom in her voice. “They always have everything scheduled and planned. The only thing is we are never included in their plans,” flies a response from the corner where women are sorting pictures of perished hostages.

Another committee activist talks to an Austrian journalist. “What do you consider your main achievement?”

“How should I put it? You see, after the tragedy we all went through it is kind of difficult to talk about successes.”

All the activists are in black, the uniform of grief. Many Ossetian women mourn for a year beginning on the day of the funeral.

Today is a special day for the staff of We are Together, the Red Cross’s psychological help center. For the first time ever, Mothers of Beslan is visiting them. Most of the committee members, unlike other Beslan women, believe they do not need psychological help.

”They never talk about their psychological problems, only about politics, about the unsuccessful search for those guilty of the deaths of their children,” say Elena Rubaeva, a psychologist. “We see aggression that cannot be vented combined with them choosing the role of victim, once and for all. I am positive this is not what they need for rehabilitation. They are constantly attending the court hearings [of the Kulaev case], and each time they relive the experiences of last September. They try to support one another within the committee. The committee has become a drug for them, but this narcotic cannot get them out of stress.”

We journalists enter the psychologist’s office to find Mothers of Beslan, a circle of twenty women in black, in a heated conversation. “We need to form a women’s battalion, if the men cannot take revenge.”

“Right,” agrees another woman, “I score 48 out of 50.”

When they see us, they switch to Ossetian, but then back to Russian.

“All women of the Caucasus should unite against the war and the terror,” says one, for our benefit, I think.

“Twenty thousand children died in Chechnya during the war. They are no different than we are,” says another.

“They are no different than we are” – one hears this a lot in conversations with Beslan women, and there is more to this assertion than may appear at first.

“Who is a mother of Beslan?” asks a Chechen acquaintance. He used to run fuel trucks from Chechnya via Beslan, but now he feels it is too dangerous. His answer, “She is no different from a woman *shakhid*,⁴ only she doesn’t wear an explosive belt. The Russian government has maimed the lives of both. One has had her brother or husband killed by the *federal*s,⁵ and the other has had her child killed by the *federal*s. Side by side, you can’t tell them apart: one wears a Chechen *khidzhab*,⁶ and the other is dressed in Ossetian mourning clothes. They have the same eyes, dog’s eyes.”

Demands from Mothers of Beslan are no less fanciful than were those of the terrorists who captured School № 1. Which is more unrealistic: to make Chechnya an independent member of CIS⁷ or to make Russian authorities tell the truth about the Beslan tragedy under pressure from the leaders of Western countries? Difficult to say.

“We don’t trust anybody.”

Investigators working on the terrorist attack case had long denied that during the storming of School № 1 the military used tanks and Shmel flamethrowers.⁸ Mothers of Beslan claims the flamethrowers caused the deaths of the hostages. Later investigators had to acknowledge their use, mainly because of evidence collected by Beslan residents: They presented the investigators with tank ammunition trays and launcher tubes. These were admitted grudgingly, and with reservations, as evidence. Alexander Torshin, chairman of the parliamentary commission for the Beslan investigation, said in an interview that one of the launcher tubes presented was not military issue.

“Why quibble?” Mothers of Beslan wrote Torchin in indignation. “Call every Shmel tube, every tank ammunition tray and every grenade launcher tube “not military issue” and be done with it. We anticipated this turn of events and held back a Shmel tube and several grenade launcher tubes [to prove their authenticity].

⁴ A suicide bomber.

⁵ Federal forces, forces of the Russian Federation.

⁶ A black headscarf covering most of the face.

⁷ Commonwealth of Independent States, the organization uniting former Soviet republics. It excludes the Baltic States. Turkmenistan exited in 2005.

⁸ Flamethrowers is, perhaps, a misnomer. Shmel is a missile-launcher delivering an incendiary or a thermo-baric charge (a vacuum bomb).

“Perhaps you believe that somebody has organized mass production of these armaments here, or that Beslan women bake them in their kitchens? What are your promises of objective investigation and your assurances that you will never have reason to be ashamed to look us in the eyes worth? It looks like we hinder your enjoyment of your luxurious life.”

“Are there people among those in power whom you trust?” I ask Susanna Dudieva.

“There are no such people. We don’t trust anybody.”

The main conclusion one comes to on becoming acquainted with Mothers of Beslan is this: anybody representing the authorities is their enemy. Should they accept the invitation to see the president, it will be to see the face of the enemy.

Mothers of Beslan does not have the universal support of Beslan residents. Some consider its activities worthy, but they are in minority. The average Beslanian, believes they have discredited themselves by the compensation they have received for dead or wounded children, which they allegedly spend lavishly on senseless luxuries like cars and vacations abroad.

“Not one of us was abroad even once in the whole year,” Annetta Gadieva, co-chair of the committee, responds with indignation. “They forget that the compensation might not even cover medical care for the afflicted children.” She adds that in Moscow, which she visited recently, “every other car on the street costs as much as the compensation for one lost child.”

Besides accusations of spending blood money, Mothers of Beslan is reproached for inconsistency and indecisiveness, not always without grounds. Their attitude toward fathers of Beslan is unfathomable: while the women pride themselves on having prevented an armed ethnic conflict [between the Ossetians and the Ingush], they reproach their husbands and brothers for not avenging the deaths of their children.

“If a child had been killed, first suffering for three days and then returned to his father in pieces [and the father does nothing], then the father has no rights to produce any more children, ever.” says Susanna Dudieva calmly.

Take another example: Mothers of Beslan once decided to walk to Vladikavkaz to protest lack of objectivity in the investigation of the terrorist attack. They got no further than the nearest intersection before turning back. They explained they did not like the way some passersby looked at them and what they said. It put a bad eye on them, so to speak. Many in Beslan were surprised that Mothers of Beslan could be stopped so easily. This is why not many took them seriously when the women threatened to march to Moscow to press for a meeting with the president.

So, how did it happen that two hundred Ossetian women united by mothers' grief have become a real force, a force even federal authorities must reckon with? What gave rise to this socio-political phenomenon? The answer is phenomenally simple: the government's lies.

“If only it would cost them a single star from their epaulets.”

“They said that our forces started firing flamethrowers into the gymnasium when there were no hostages left.” Susanna Dudieva claims. “But what about the dead and the wounded? Weren't they hostages too? And where were they?”

The key word here is *our*. It is striking that for her the people who have killed her son are still “our forces.” But the authorities take it for granted and make no use of it, and do everything they can to turn “our” into “their.”

“The Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Disaster Relief for Emergency Situations shot footage at 7:45 a.m. on September 4, as the stamp in the corner of the frame shows. I see my son, propped against the gymnastic ladder on the wall, dead. Next to him should be his cousin, Alla, and her classmates who were our neighbors. But some of them were found only five days later, some - ten days later, others – a month later. Why? Because they could not be identified. They were burned as if by a blowtorch. Or take the boy, Khasan. His mother found him on September 5, dead, had identified him. All he had was a bullet wound in the leg, nothing else, no other bullet or bomb fragment wounds. But she found him burned from head to toe. What does it mean? Perhaps he got burned while he was unconscious.”

“Who will answer for that?” asks Emiliya Bzarova. “Do you know how my son looked when I found him? Nicely roasted.”

Emiliya Bzarova is not insane, nor does she want to be shocking. This is how she remembers her son. She is a quintessential committeewoman. In her heart, despair has turned into obsession, into hunger for truth and revenge. “Why have charges been brought against the heads of the Beslan police for criminal negligence in letting the terrorists into the school building while heads of operation headquarters, the big brass, have not been charged with anything? Didn't they commit criminal negligence killing my son?”

In a letter to Alexander Torshin, chairman of the parliamentary investigation commission, Mothers of Beslan expresses the same hunger for truth and revenge: “Perhaps it would suit you fine if we left the country, but even then we would continue searching for the truth, through international bodies. It just cannot be that the deaths of so many should bring only rewards and awards and no punishment.”

“If it cost them a single star from their epaulets, if they were not rewarded for a bungled operation, if they felt ashamed before us... ” says Susanna Dudieva, as if chanting an incantation. “We are not even calling for criminal charges. Let them name the guilty, and then they can decide whether to prosecute. We are not bloodthirsty; we don’t want anybody put behind bars. The guilty must be named so that, should the same thing happen again, God forbid, the likes of Patrushev and Nurgaliev⁹ would know that they will be held responsible before the law.”

As to charges that the committee has ties to the opposition, they are not groundless. Mothers of Beslan joined forces with the United Ossetia party, the main opposition in North Ossetia, to bring down the then-president of the republic, Alexander Dzasokhov. This happened after authorities refused to authorize their Women against Terror rally, slated for the center of Vladikavkaz. Later, President Dzasokhov resigned, for which Women of Beslan takes some credit. The committee seems to be merging demonstratively with the opposition more recently. Their interests at Nurpashi Kulaev’s trial are now being represented by Taimuraz Chedzhemov, a lawyer and the former head of the Central Executive Committee of North Ossetia. Mr. Chedzhemov is one of the most active opposition figures in the republic.

Under the right conditions, Mothers of Beslan could conceivably evolve into a force for political opposition, especially considering that the authorities feed their dissident attitudes time and time again.

Beslan Syndrome

Izvestia, August 30, 2005

Part 3. Hatred

Izvestia continues its series of articles on the psychological difficulties that residents of Beslan are living with today, a year after the tragedy

A YEAR after the tragedy, Beslan still brims with hatred: hatred toward the Ingush, who are viewed as either terrorists or their accomplices; hatred toward the authorities, who did not do everything in their power to save the hostages; women’s hatred toward men for not having taken revenge for the deaths of their children and reciprocal hatred from the men toward the women for their endless mourning. But the men have no clear target for revenge. They cannot bring revenge on all the Ingush,

⁹ Heads of the Federal Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, respectively.

because the government would not let them, and besides the urge is gone. They understand now that somehow it would be wrong. And so far, they have not had much success taking revenge on the authorities. As a result, Beslan residents stew in this hatred.

“How would we be any better than the terrorists?”

I am telling Murat Bolotaev, a local resident, about the women’s grievances against the Beslan men. On September 3, Murat carried children from the school building under the terrorists’ fire. He was on TV a lot then, and people often asked if his children were in the building. His children were not; he did it because he is a real man.

Murat gets so angry his hands leave the steering wheel of his car, “Don’t they know what people say about them? They say they wear black in Beslan and change to fancy dresses when they go abroad!”

After a while he calms down. “To tell the truth, we still feel guilty, because there is a grain of truth in what the women say – we have not avenged ourselves. I feel ashamed to visit our people in Russia. If I tell them that I am from Beslan, they will ask, “Isn’t that where your people had their asses whipped and just swallowed it?””

The men of Beslan have noticeably more difficulty coping with the consequences of the terrorists attack than do the women and children. Revenge must be taken, but on whom? On Ingushetia where the terrorists came? “Let’s say we put some men together and go there. Whom do we kill there? Women and children again?” says Murat Bolotaev. “How would we be any better than the terrorists?”

Revenge must be taken, but the authorities will not allow it. The large village of Nogir stands on the road from Vladikavkaz to Beslan. The villagers’ roots are in South Ossetia, where people are more temperamental and warlike. In the first days after the tragedy, Nogir villagers were the most vocal in calling for revenge. They began forming armed units, each 20 men strong, and enlisted volunteers outside the local cultural center. There was much shouting and oath taking, but soon, it is said, men in civilian clothes started visiting the Nogir activists. One of the activists, a distinguished citizen of Nogir, was told, “You are doing well, aren’t you? Everything might change; think about it.” The activists decided they didn’t want changes in their lives; so the idea of revenge slipped away.

“There will be war here, anyway, sooner or later.”

There are rumors that some Beslan residents are covertly seeking revenge. There is a search going on for the escaped terrorists; no one in Beslan doubts that some did escape, despite official claims to the contrary. So far, none of the city’s dead has been

“exchanged for,” as they term it. In this small town, if even one had, it would be widely known.

Meanwhile, the image of Vitaly Kaloev haunts every Beslan man. Kaloev is an Ossetian charged with murdering a Swiss Air traffic controller who caused an air collision in which Kaloev’s wife and two children were killed. Only a rare Ossetian woman would fail to mention him as an example to follow when the year-long mourning ends. “I have to disappoint you; the story about the Caucasian woman throwing a white kerchief on the ground to stop the fighting between Caucasian men is a fairy tale, for tourists and journalists,” a Beslan mother who lost her child in the terrorist attack tells me.

There is a story told enthusiastically in Beslan about a former hostage, the only one who refused the compensation money. I couldn’t find him in official documents or through the grapevine. Perhaps he exists only as the embodiment of hope in the existence of altruism. The comments the story evokes are far from idealistic: “he should have taken the money and contracted a killer to bump off a couple of Ingush.”

Almost everybody in Beslan views the Ingush as terrorists. Immediately after the tragic events at School № 1, shuttle traders from Ingushetia and Chechnya stopped using the Beslan airport for their flights to Turkey. The Chechen students transferred out of Vladikavkaz colleges rather than chance it there. “There never were many Ingush students in our city,” says Sarmat, a student at the medical school there. He predicts that Christian North Ossetia faces imminent influx from its exclusively Muslim neighbors.

There is no denying that the Beslan tragedy has complicated already tense Ossetian-Ingush relations. In North Ossetia, it is difficult to find a taxi driver willing to take you to Ingushetia. “Not for any money.” and “Without protection?” are the usual answers. At best, the driver would call a colleague from Ingushetia to pick you up at Chermensky circle, the police post at the administrative border between the two republics. There he would pass you to the Ingush driver telling him, ““Watch out, because I have written down your plate number.”

Elza Baskaeva was the editor of Beslan newspaper *Zhizn Pravoberezhya* until recently. She speaks of how life here is gradually re-acquiring the sounds of a normal life: children discovered laughing; three dogs, allegedly silent since the terrorist attack, heard barking. Soon the yearlong mourning period will end and there will be music on the streets. Suddenly she adds, “Anyway, there will be war here, sooner or later. I have already sent my daughter to Moscow.”

Izvestia has learned that donations from reserve funds of regions and republics of the Russian Federation formed the charitable fund from which compensation to former hostages and their families has been paid. These donations were 15 million to 20 million

rubles. No need to guess who ordered payments from these funds. It could have only been the president. Growing inter-ethnic conflict in the North Caucasus, it appears, were so menacing that it warranted dousing flames with heavy, semi-voluntary donations.

Despite the widely held belief that the foreigners have been incredibly generous toward Beslan residents, most of the charitable fund that paid compensation came from Russian sources, and they included private donors.

“I was silly. I pinned my hopes on the State.”

Beslan teenagers who have escaped the attention of foreign charities are playing “shoot-em-up” at the local Internet café, Block Post. Since the terrorist attack, it has become a popular place. The décor is militaristic: bullet-perforated body armor on the wall is smeared with fake blood; there are metal ammunition boxes, war helmets and other military paraphernalia on the floor.

The ruins of School № 1 are covered in graffiti. Its walls look like pages of a giant book of condolences. The inscriptions are desperate appeals for forgiveness from dead children for failing to protect them. The atmosphere of guilt is overwhelming.

There is nothing on the walls about the Ingush. Instead, there are politically correct slogans wishing death to some abstract terrorists. Angry invectives against the authorities have disappeared, which is strange. In the first days after the tragedy, the names of President Putin and of Alexander Dzasokhov figured on the walls with the frequency of references to the terrorists, and in about the same context. The graffiti has been edited with a sure hand.

Here and there, patches of gray paint contain inscriptions referring to Lidiya Tsalieva, the school’s director. They are mostly in the same hand. Among the least offensive, “Lidiya, you are a bitch; you are guilty in the death of our children.” It looks like someone has tried to redirect people’s anger from the two presidents by substituting one director. The edited graffiti has sown seeds of hate. Tsalieva is now blamed for everything: that she let the terrorists into the school, that she stashed weapons for them under the floor boards. It does not make any difference that she has not been charged, that she is a witness in the case, that she was almost the last one evacuated from the building, wounded, that her grandchildren and her sister Zara were among the hostages, or that Zara almost lost her sight.

“If she had been in cahoots with the terrorists, wouldn’t she have found a way to warn them [her relatives]?” asks Zoya Sugarova, a German-language teacher. Sugarova has

worked at School № 1 for 20 years, knows Tsalieva well, and believes she would never have become an accomplice to terrorists. The first rule of disinformation is operating here: the more preposterous the accusation, the more easily people can be made to believe it. So, Lidiya Tsalieva, an honorary citizen, a teacher of flawless reputation, has been transformed into a collaborator.

Larisa Sokaeva lost her only daughter, 12-year-old Albina. On September 1, leaving for school, Albina left a toy on the table and a note for her grandmother, “Don’t put it away, I’ll be back soon.” A year later, the toys and the note still lie on the table. Larisa’s husband has been ill since his daughter’s death. Albina’s grandmother has died; she was hit by a car.

Today, for the first time since last September, Larisa is visiting the school grounds. We enter the ruins of the gymnasium with a group of local people. We see colorful advertising banners from a popular television channel and a radio station; they lie across gym benches. The banners contain expressions of solidarity with Beslan residents. Somebody next to me mutters “nitwits.” Larisa pulls the banners from the benches, crumples them and throws into a half-burned closet.

Larisa makes a visible effort to reflect on the events of last September: “I was silly. I thought the terrorist would sit us in the classrooms, give us food and drink, come to terms with the authorities, and let us go. I relied on the State for help.”

“I didn’t know there was anyone who relied on it,” I interject.

“Perhaps I was the last. I was teaching law as part of continuing ed courses for railroad personnel. While my daughter and I were sitting there with bombs hanging over our heads, and we were waiting for the government to free us, I kept repeating to myself the words from a textbook that the president is the guarantor of the constitution. It proved to be a bad textbook or a bad president. He had better not come here for the anniversary,” she concludes.

“The firemen were scared and would not go near the school until we beat them.”

We meet a young man in the gymnasium. Vadim Fidarov’s hair has gone completely white. He is a grandson of Tarkan Sabanov, a former director of School № 1 and a Beslan legend. Tarkan Sabanov worked at the school for 27 years. He built the gymnasium and died here.

Vadim seems at home in the school’s the ruins, carrying himself with the flare of a professional guide. He shows us where the “pedal man,” the terrorist who held his foot on the detonator, sat. He squints an eye at the five-storey apartment building nearby and bids us to follow suit. He explains that it is a dead zone: a sniper firing from that build-

ing could not have shot the pedal man.¹⁰ “See these burned patches on the floor? This is where there were no bodies on the floor during the fire,” he says. There are not many burned patches on the gymnasium floor.

“And then there is this hole in the wall the men made with a barbell to bring the fire hose in, because the fireman did not have a hose long enough. In fact, what the fireman did not have were enough brains. They had three days to fill water tanks of the fire trucks and they did not. The firemen were so scared, they would not go near the school until we beat them. They insisted they did not have protective clothing; and in any case, it was not their business to fight fires dodging bullets. They should be put on trial.”

Vadim always carries keys to the adjacent weights room with him. He still has them on the key-chain hanging from his belt. He used to spend evenings there with his friends, often staying late. The night before September 1 went as usual. The friends pumped iron, then chatted and left after 1 a.m. “Did you have an impression there were strangers in the building? Some say that one group of terrorists had sneaked into the school days in advance of the hostage taking.”

“Impossible, we would have noticed. If anybody came in, it could only have been late at night or early in the morning of the first.”

Vadim shows us a picture of the Beslan basketball team taken in the gymnasium of School № 1, before it was ruined. Vadim runs his finger over faces of the team: this one lost his sister, this one – his mother, this one died here. His finger stops at the face of a young man. “Him,” says Vadim, “he is the only Beslan policeman who stood up to the terrorist. (He says his name.) He took down one of them with his police-issue handgun in the first minutes of the attack.

“Just don’t publish his name, just in case, because they might try to get even, though his chief blew his identity long ago. He should have got recognized as a hero, but instead they are pestering him with an investigation: how did he know they were terrorists, why he did not fire warning shots, how come he carried his weapon off duty? This is how it always – putting down the best.”

“Even on September 2 there was chaos; there was no unified operation command.”

A middle-aged woman, Zara, joins our conversation. She had been among the hostages, but on September 2 she and her little nephew were released to Ruslan Aushev.¹¹ Zara recalls the events following her release.

¹⁰ In one version of the events, the building was stormed after a bomb exploded when the terrorist on the detonator was shot by a sniper.

¹¹ The terrorists released 26 people, including 15 babies, to Ruslan Aushev, former president of Ingushetia.

“They began taking me to various special services: FSB, the Alpha group. They were snatching me from each other, as a valuable witness. One investigator, say from FSB, is taking my testimony, while a guy from Alpha is breathing down his neck, “Hurry, we need her too.” And the first answers, “You will wait. We are not sorting paper clips here.” Though it looked like what, in fact, they were doing.

“I saw the security operatives looking at some drawings and I realized from their conversation that they had mistaken them for the floor plans of School № 1. I could see they were plans of some other school. I went to School № 1. I told them they were mistaken, and they said this was the only floor plan they had. So I had to get the right floor plans from a friend.

“Even on September 2 there was still complete chaos around the school, each service pulling the blanket over to its own side of the bed. There was no unified operation command to speak of. The storming of the school could not have ended any other way but in tragedy.”

Murat Kaboev, a former submariner, is writing a book about the Beslan tragedy, about the truth of it. A stream of eyewitnesses visits him, sharing information and recollections. Listening to them, he often cannot hold back tears, although he has not lost any relatives there. Recently, after a court session of the Nurpashi Kulaev trial, a man who lost his child at School № 1 visited him. The man told him, “I want to burn myself, because we will never get justice.” Since then, Murat Kaboev tries hard not to shed a tear.

Elvira Goryukhina (Novosibirsk) A Teacher's Travels in the Caucasus



Novaya Gazeta, January 20, 2000

The author offers a series of articles on the impressions and experiences she has gathered during numerous journeys to the post-Soviet Caucasus. The first article centers on refugees who fled the breakaway Georgian province of Abkhazia during the 1992-94 Abkhazian War and settled in Kodori Gorge on the border with Chechnya. Svans, a Georgian ethnic group, mostly inhabit this semi-independent enclave deep in the mountains. Its existence is contested by Abkhazia.

In the second article, Ms. Goryukhina describes life in Nagorny Karabakh, an independent although unrecognized republic inhabited mostly by Armenians. Nagorny Karabakh won its independence from Azerbaijan in a war that started in 1988 and ended with a cease-fire in 1994.

In the last two articles, the author reports from Chechnya.

Introduction

WHEN did it all begin? Perhaps on the night of April 9, 1990, when it seemed that all of Georgia had gathered in Rustaveli Prospect to mark the first anniversary and remember its events. I threw myself into the crowd to relive the bitterness and pain of those days. It was an act of unspoken apology that I had not been with them the year before. At home they warned me not to stay long. As I stood chatting in Russian, old and young Georgians reached out to me: "Such a pity," they said, "that we have so few Russians with us today!"

At four in the morning, when people were recalling the din of Soviet tanks in the city's streets exactly a year earlier, cries for an ambulance came from the crowd. Merely remembering was causing people to faint. The burning effigy of General Rodionov¹ looked different than it would appear later on television. It resembled a pagan ceremony in which people released fears and illusions into the fire. The fire was fading away, so was the pain. People walked away with their backs straight.

¹ General Igor Rodionov, then commander of the Transcaucasian Military District, directed the Russian army's assault on peaceful demonstrators in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, in April 1989. He later became the Minister of Defense of Russia.

How could they know that these flames carried another sign as well. Twenty were dead. A year and a half later, when I was hiding from bombs in besieged Sukhumi, nobody counted the victims – there were too many. Once I crawled into a communication technician's booth at a health resort belonging to the Moscow Military District. Russians, Georgians and Ukrainians who had failed to escape this hell in time were huddled together. There were only a few candles and no food. We could hear the storm at sea and the bombs exploding over the Sukhumi suburb of Esher. Whose bombs were they? No one knew. A sense of unreality overwhelmed us. It was, nevertheless, real. The empire was falling apart.

Ever since, whenever I get time from work, I pack my backpack and set off on the Chechnya-Ossetia-Ingushetia-Karabakh-Abkhazia-Georgia route.

Look What Life Has Done to Us

Druzhiba Narodov, Issue № 10, 1997

“**W**OULD you like to go to the Kodori Gorge?” Lilya Leonidze asks me. Lilya is related to Georgy Leonidze, a Georgian literature classic. “Yes, I would,” I respond, with no premonition that the gorge could have become my resting place.

There were five of us: four refugees from Sukhumi and me. Three were sisters – Tamara, Eteri and Lamara. Their brother Pavel had led them from their burning home in September 1993. Pavel is dead now.

We five spend the nightlong train ride to Zugudy in one sleeping compartment. To save money, we do not ask for bed sheets. Then there was a horrible bus ride to Chuberi. The Georgians have come to terms with the harsher conditions of their life quickly. Tolerance hasn't just been preserved, it has been thrust forward as the defining trait of their national character. It's nothing that a sack of flour has fallen on your head. You may be sure that if one of your bags falls on someone's head, you will hear no complaints. Life is tough. You can read it in the eyes of your companion. Their eyes seem to say: Look what life has done to us. Has it really changed us? What can we do in these times of trial? Why us? Why?

Chuberi is in Svaneti.² The famous Svanetian towers, ancient trees and silence accompanied by the rumble of small mountain rivers distinguish the area. Cattle are grazing;

² A mountainous region of Georgia and the highest inhabited area in Europe.

a rare car disturbs the silence. From the fork in the road, it is about seven kilometers to Chuberi. We pick up our heavy baggage and set off slowly for the village. We carry a case of vodka, flour, matches, bread and other goods that they lack in Kodori Gorge. I knew little of the gorge except that in the rainy autumn of 1993, thousands of women, elderly and children walked through it to the Chuberi Pass. They were driven by grief, shame and fear. I had seen Misha Chiaureli's bitter, agonizing film about those days. The thought of walking this refugee road has never left me. And here I am, going to Kodori in the company of refugees.

Before dusk, we find a house where we hoped to spend the night. It has a huge green backyard surrounded by a fence without a gate. In its place is a ladder, so the cattle won't get in. At first, the house seems empty. Finally, an old woman comes in, carrying a cane in one hand and a bag of figs in the other. She laughs toothlessly – happy as a child to welcome guests. She is one of three old women who live in the house. I never understood how they were related. All are over eighty.

Everyone arrives with the coming darkness – the son with his wife and the grandchild. There are now eleven of us, and everyone speaks in Svan. The lower part of the house is a big cellar where the family spends the winter; during the cold the upper part is closed. There are hard couches with thin mattresses, a furnace, clean dirt floors and a lonely light bulb hanging from the ceiling. The long wooden table and benches along the window can accommodate about thirty. I plump down on the couch and fall asleep in a wink. From the twilight of my dream, I can hear the throaty gurgle of Svan. I feel such comfort, as though I've finally found my long-lost home.

Someone wakes me. Supper is ready; it is my first in Svaneti. I can't take my eyes off the old woman, our hostess, at the head of the table. Minadora possesses a powerful, low voice. No matter what she says, it sounds poetic – as though she speaks in Homeric hexameter. She is almost ninety. In her past she was the thunder of Svaneti. Armed with a gun, she galloped over the hills and the mountains organizing collective farming. "I am the worst gangster here," she says. Minadora chain smokes filterless cigarettes and dreams of getting her hands on a small flashlight. A flashlight is indispensable on winter nights. I decide I must bring her one, and she reads my mind, "No, bring me a gun instead. Don't worry, I won't shoot. One of my relatives got killed. If I were younger I would have shot the killer myself. Now what can I do?"

Overwhelming joy, the feeling that I'm sitting with my kin, jolts me to the realization that I have always longed for this life and this family. I ask a young man what he will do here during the long snowy winter. He replies plainly, as another young man could have a century ago, "I will protect my elders." That simple – protect the elders, what else?

Our fest is in full swing. Minadora toasts me saying: “I would give my arm just to speak your language and to receive you in the tradition of your people.” Is that what Pushkin called “the day of union?” Union with Svaneti?

Early in the morning we pack our stuff and we’re off to the bus stop. By now, we feel pretty comfortable with one another. We see children going to school. Their teacher, yesterday a student himself, stops to talk to us. Merab Chhetiani, a native of Chuberi says that nine years ago he moved to Dmanicy because of the earthquake, but returned because his father’s grave is here. He wants to build a house in Svaneti, which is rich in forests. Not long ago, there was work for everybody and you would hardly ever see anybody drunk. “See that Zhiguli³ driving over the mountain? The people in it are looking for a morning drink. There is no work. This is bad. Some businessmen came from America. They were looking for something, but it fizzled out. No one came from Russia.” Merab invites us to stop by his house.

The door to the watermill is open. I enter and stuff corn into my handkerchief to take with me as a memento. The bus didn’t come that day.

The next morning, Minadora brings a large portrait of her brother as a handsome Georgian lad. He is dressed in the traditional costume of Svan. His dagger shines. Zakro Ansiany was a very famous man in Svaneti. He was arrested in 1937. Minadora was betrothed then. Her brother thought he would return in a couple of months. “Don’t get married till I return,” he said when she visited him in prison. He was shot. He said he would come back and he didn’t. Minadora never married. I tried to understand what was she saying; Minadora just repeated, “He said he would return and he didn’t....”

Only later, in Kodori Gorge, do I finally understand that what we call folklore is not necessarily just an oral tradition, it could be a way of life, a way of thinking, a way of understanding and explaining life.

“My heart is not that weak,” says Minadora, “but for sixty years now my pillow has been wet every morning.”

During the night, some people come with news: a police car has fallen off a cliff and the young men were ridden over as they jumped from the car. They were taken to Tbilisi by helicopter with broken spines, arms and legs. We were hoping to move on tomorrow. The story has a moral for us – no matter what happens, never leave the car. I would learn later that I cannot jump from a moving car anyway.

On the third day, we went to the bus stop again. If we need to, we will go there every day until we catch a bus. Minadora’s last words: “you must come back!”

³ A Russian-made automobile.

“I will. God willing, I will, my dear friend Minadora.”

Pavel yells that the bus is coming. The bus is really a truck. We hop in tugging all our belongings. As a guest, I get the best spot on the open truck bed, next to the cabin. I stand there clutching the sideboard, while the metal gas canisters tied with wire to the same sideboard hit our legs every time the truck turns. No one pays any attention, so I don't either.

There is no road to Kodori Gorge. There are mountains, chasms, huge grey rocks. A car finds its own path or makes one in this wonderful, enchanted forest. There are small wooden bridges that somehow hold vehicles. I am wondering how we can still be alive. Our truck has begun to slide rapidly down one of the slopes, and the men are only able to stop it by wedging rocks under the wheels. We have to disembark and go on foot. The noon sun is scorching. In pants and a jacket, I am sweltering; my blood pressure rises as we walk. I don't have any emotion left, just a simple desire to lie down and never rise again; psychological reactions had disappeared at once. I suspect the same happened to those refugees. I knew that they had walked as long as they could, and then they lay down and died. Those who were able to go on, did so. On their way, they stopped to read the pieces of paper pinned to the clothing of the dead to see if they had known them as neighbors.

Eteri, one of the sisters, hands me a flower to cheer me up. Did she find it among the boulders? I throw it away. My soul is not responding to beauty. In a half an hour, she hands me another, “Maybe this one is better, Elvira?” I was not ashamed. Each step spans your entire life. At that moment when you say your last farewell to life, something awakens in you. You become a new person. I remember it distinctly. I was not the same – the old me had died, and a new me was born. We came to the top, got back onto the truck and entered the world of mountains.

There are only mountains, mountains and nothing else. They are eternal and you are not. But at this moment, we breathe the same air; we exist in the same space. As soon as you enter the mountain air, your fears are left behind. Happiness doesn't matter. Such notions are left behind too.

Although the abyss into which you could fall is with you constantly, there is also the presence of something greater than you. You feel a part of it. Maybe that's why you are no longer afraid to die. The fragility of your existence no longer frightens you once you face the absolute beauty that has taken the form of mountains. Transpersonal notions and incredibly sharpened awareness govern you. The inseparability of possible death and the miracle of life lend a state of detachment from everything that has previously engaged you. Your values are gone. They leave space for an excruciating exertion of life forces.

Might this be the unbearable lightness of being? I was waiting to experience the feeling of man's supremacy over nature described by a Russian poet: "The Caucasus is beneath me. I stand alone on the heights..." Instead, although we stand on the mountains and observe them from the top, they seem much higher – they are supreme. Maybe a poet can soar beyond and describe them differently. I have no words to convey this state of mind, this wild and desperate abandon, while I stand with mountains within reach.

I recall a discussion with one of my students, Iliia Maksimkin, about Georgian national character as movies and literature portray it. He had said: "Perhaps, it's all in the mountains. Georgians face eternity everyday. It cannot pass without consequence. Just standing there, the mountains create a different scale of values; life, especially your own, becomes a variable." Iliia sensed it well because of his experience climbing the Belukha Mountain in Altai.

We stop to wait for the car coming from Kodori to pass before ascending Chuberi Pass. A refugee from Sakeni points to the place where a woman refugee and her newborn child died on September 28. She went into labor on the top of the pass. An unusually early snowstorm came and they froze to death.

"Now we are just tired. Back then we were humiliated," says Pavel. He, like all the others, cannot forget September 1993.

Descending the pass was much more frightening than ascending it. That part of the trip took us five hours. The driver dropped us at Omarishari; from there we must reach Gentzvishi on our own. At last we are walking on a road – a rough road, but still a road. Its very stability is precious: you can stand on it and not slither away. What a joy it was to stand up! I just stood there laughing happily with the three sisters – home at last.

Gentzvishi greeted us with tears. Poliska, a beautiful eighty-year-old woman, the mother of the three sisters, was sitting by the grave of her youngest son, Zurab, crying. His body had been brought from Tbilisi, over the deadly road, to be buried in the family cemetery. People come when they hear crying, and by Svanian tradition they sprinkle the earth with alcohol.

Kodori Gorge is protected by civilian self-defense groups. In the mountains, and because of them, they have become an unwavering force. Armed only with shotguns, the Svan men are even a threat to the Chechens, who, it should be said, have helped evict Georgians from Sukhumi.

"There is no greater shame for a nation," says David Pirveli, one of the gorge's defenders recalling the Georgians' retreat. "It is unheard of. Have you ever read it in history

books? An army, personnel carriers, soldiers, march in front, and behind them there is a column of women, elders and children. Why wouldn't the army go behind to protect them? Do you know? I don't know either."

On the brink

I met a strikingly beautiful young woman at Zurab's grave. The natural gold of her shoulder-length hair shined, and her skin was untouched by makeup. Later, I notice that her skirt is ripped in places, her jacket has been mended too many times, the soles of her slippers are coming off. Her simple manner did not make her different from other Svans, and she looked to be on equal terms with them. Still there was an air of independence about her, and she had a Slavic gentleness. I was happy to hear the well-spoken Russian that I hadn't heard for a week. She interpreted the graveside speeches of the Svanian men for me. Their insightful remarks surprised me. Occasionally, when she was unable to find a right word, she would admit sadly: "There is no suitable word in Russian. It is closed to us." Svetlana Tzipiani and I became friends. Svetlana was born in Perm, in the Urals; she had come to Sukhumi when she was a child.

The oldest of Sveta's three children, 15-year-old Lika, was kidnapped this summer. Gioni, Sveta's husband, gathered the entire village. They were armed to the teeth and about to go to war with the Omarishari, who had taken the child. But the captors sent a note – in Lika's hand but dictated by the village elders. The note promised that everything would be all right. Sveta felt that fighting would be senseless. "We are going to visit them," she says.

"How is that possible? They stole your child; they are your enemies!"

"No," Sveta says, "they are good people and this is a good household. Of all who could have kidnapped Lika, they are the best." Sveta searches through old photographs, finds the one she wants to show me and invites me to look at her eyes when she was just eight. "Her fate is in them and this summer's story as well." The girl's eyes are not those of a child. The drama is not waiting to be revealed. It had been known to the child, and she had accepted it.

There are two more girls in the household, seven-year-old Lana and fourteen-year-old Inna. Everybody is involved in the chores, just like in the Siberian village where I had worked as a teacher. Everything on the farm is done naturally – tending the pigs and cows, making *chacha* (apples and pears are dropped into a big tank, crushed by a heavy mallet and left to sour). The Tzipiani family lives in a house that belongs to Gioni's family. Their apartment in Sukhumi has been plundered and is occupied by strangers.

Sveta was wounded in Sukhumi during Russian air bombardments. Sveta knew they were Russian planes, but she stayed in the city because she was sure that nothing would happen to her. It was impossible for her husband to stay and he left. How many times have Russians been betrayed by the false notion of security under the wings of their mother country. Meanwhile, great Mother Russia is blind and deaf to the sights and the sounds of her dying children.

Sveta believed that she, a Russian by blood, would get back her house and her life back. Some Armenian people, however, turned her in. Sveta spoke their last name and then reconsidered: "Please don't think badly of Armenians. Some betrayed me, others saved my life. My brother, who carries his stepfather's Georgian name, had to leave Sukhumi or else he would have been killed. Armenians transported him at night secretly, in an ambulance. Then it was our turn, my children and I. My shoulder was wounded. They took me out as a casualty. Before fleeing I had to hide in a neighbor's wardrobe. The battles in the mountains along Kodori River had reached their peak. Lana was only four then. Armenians took Sveta to Sochi and lodged her with their relatives. "What are we going to eat?" she asked. "Whatever we eat, you'll eat," they answered. Eventually, Sveta found someone to take her to Moscow for half-price. From Moscow, she would go to Perm. By then she knew that Gioni was alive.

Sveta, though a native of Perm, did not feel welcome there. The problems of the Caucasus were far away from the Russian villagers. The village men drank. There were no jobs. "You're the only one I can tell this to, Elvira. I hadn't seen the Russians in a long time. They were different from the Russians I remember. I don't blame anyone. Their life is not sugary. But when a childhood friend with a whole brood of chickens refuses to give your child an egg, I feel very bad. In the Caucasus, this does not happen. Besides, a Svan man cannot live far from his home, so my husband had joined us. After a restless few months, I realized that he can only find peace in his father's house. His father was alive but in poor health. We were able to care for him. He passed away in April and we buried him here. Yes, we are poor, but we own a house. This is the best we can do for now."

Sveta worked as a guide and a Polish interpreter in Sukhumi. Her children speak three languages. All Svanian traditions are sacredly kept in the house. Sveta is not too fond of some, but she does not complain, "These are the customs of the nation to which my husband and my children belong." Sveta is the village plate keeper – she stores 300 plates in her house. It is the village's supply for funerals and memorials. In the past three years, there have not been any weddings.

I left a small hand towel for Lana. When I saw it the next day, I discovered that she had transformed the towel into a doll. She kissed it and took it to bed with her. I was disappointed that I did not have much to leave them. The girls' shoes took in water. What's going to happen when the cold comes?

We are trudging through wild bushes to the mountain river. The only way to cross the river is by jumping from rock to rock. I would have stopped by now, but Lana and Inna believe fervently that something bad will happen if we don't get to their christening place. The grownups in Kodori Gorge view communal christening as a way of reducing the stress the children experience.

Lana and Inna remember every detail from 1993. They remember their mother's condition after being wounded, the roar of Russian planes, the refugees who left their homes and ran for Kodori Gorge. They remember many who collapsed on the road and died there. They remember things by years, days, hours and minutes just like we remember the first day of World War II: "June 22 at 4 p.m. Kiev is under attack and the announcement came that the war has begun."

Inna wants to be a singer. Before the war, her parents got her a piano. But at the moment, Inna and I are sorting beans while she is thinking aloud about going to a neighbor's to get an enema for a calf. There is a painful collision of lives in Inna – the prewar life resists everything the new one offers.

The girls' favorite thing is to go to the kumed, an area on the edge of the gulf. Walking on the edge is not bad at all! Gentzvishi is in the mountains, but you don't feel secluded there. I've discovered a new sense of freedom in these mountains. It is a vertical view of the world, instead of the customary horizontal. I catch myself looking up at the sky. Perhaps this is what Yuri Trifonov, the Russian writer, meant when he said that he saw a universe in the eyes of an old Georgian man? Something pulls you up from the gorge into the universe and gives you insight into life's purpose.

I have come across a deep craving for culture here. The children have a seemingly psychological need for books and art – things we associate with civilized society. "I am going to show you a wonderful book filled with pictures of different animals," Lana says. I expected to see an album, but she brought me a seventh-grade biology textbook. To them, this ordinary, poorly printed, worn textbook is a guide to other worlds and places. This urge for printed reality is almost magical. If it weren't, wouldn't nature be able to replace this urge with something of its own?

Dali, the local teacher, has a tape recorder and two tapes at home. On each visit, Lana turns her back to us and stands before the tape recorder as if before an altar. It is almost impossible to distract her from it. When Sveta sees it, she cries. She understands that they are not exposed to culture as they should be and that they might never get the education they need.

What if culture carries unique observation and understanding without which the child's soul cannot develop fully. Nature is believed to be more significant than anything man-

made; yet something attracts a child to little black scribbles and signs and to a foggy old pictures of an elephant and a giraffe. What drives a child into a trance at the sounds of a piano and a violin? Here we are in a world with natural beauty. Why do we need paper and paint to transform this world into our own depiction? Perhaps because a child's longing for cultural signs is a longing for the past. Small children experience the absence of culture more sharply than adults. Some parents are disturbed by this. A mother of three in Kutaisi asked me if her children were sick because they read the same book over and over. "They are like crazy maniacs. They read something they don't understand, doing it only for the sake of the process. I get frightened when I see it." It's unbearable to see parent's helplessness in such cases.

Despite the lack of laundry detergent, shoes, toothbrushes, the loss of routine, and the wound not healing – despite everything – there is a feeling of peace in the house. Observing life in Kodori Gorge, I realized that this peace comes from love. Husband's love toward his wife, mother's love toward her children, children's toward parents, love toward in-laws, love toward all the ill, helpless and elderly. Never again in my life will I see such pure love. This unvarnished, miraculous and courageous love is their last sanctuary. Its vital, organic power saves the people from madness.

We were strolling on the brink of the gulf and met Gioni, the girls' father. He was going to check on his plot of land high in the mountains. The mountains are dangerously steep. Seven-year-old Lana begs Gioni to take her with him. He hesitates, then suddenly says with passion: "I love you so much that I can't say no to you."

Inna stays with me while father and daughter climb the cliff. The fall's sun is setting and we see them dragging their shadows along. We stay to watch them climb. Their bodies disappear behind the trees from time to time only to reappear later in the trees' gaps. We watch them rise higher and higher until they turn into two small dots and finally disappear. Inna turns and says, "She loves him so much that she climbs as well as a grownup."

Gioni and I are making *chacha*. "I am thinking of how to help Sveta preserve her beauty for at least another five or ten years. What should I do?" Gioni is only half asking, half thinking aloud. I begin giving him the usual beauty tips. But I realize that he is talking about a different type of beauty. For him, it is her inner beauty that must stand against the struggles and brutality of life. Only this is important to him. "No matter how sweet is my dream, the awakening is always sweeter because I awake to my wife's face." That is how they live.

We are trying to warm up next to the furnace late one night. Suddenly, Inna impulsively kisses her father's hand. "If you only knew how much I love papa..." And Sveta tells me

a story about how the soldiers connected her once with Gioni by radio. He was already in Gentsvishi without his family, at the combat site. He didn't know whether Sveta was alive: "He was crying on the other end while everyone else, including the soldiers, was crying here. Everyone always asks me why we stay here. Once, I dreamt that two suns were rising on top of Kodori Gorge. Like two great spheres rising for me and my people. This dream gave me hope. This is a sign that from Kodori Gorge I will get back home. The gorge is our destiny."

Nodar is the head of the house where the sisters and I stayed when we arrived. He is fifty years old and resembles Hemingway. He has a youngish face and a grey beard. He saw his house burned in Sukhumi. His wife and family live in Mtzheti in a small barrack. We brought him good news; he has become a grandfather. His grandson's name is Georgy. God knows when, if ever, grandpa will get to see his grandchild.

Everybody here is related. There are only a few families in Gentsvishi: Pirveli, Chopliani, Tzipioni, Dzachviani, Hergiani. Nodar heads the civilian self-defense detachment. His house is its headquarters. As soon as we arrived, Nodar sat me down and advised me strictly not to walk alone. "If something happens to you, the whole world will say that Svans are a bunch of mountain goats." I disobeyed the chief and was sorry about it later. But what happened to me was nothing compared with what happened to these people.

An old car took me to Azhara.⁴ The legendary Nukzar Pangani lives there. They write songs and poems about him. His house reminded me of a scene from a patriotic Soviet movie, with palm trees replacing the movie's birches. The commanders from the village detachment sat at a large stump planning protection of the Gorge. My entrance interrupted their secret work. Pangani is a fair-haired, friendly man who speaks Russian fluently. He graduated from the Leningrad Physics Institute. I ask him to describe the most difficult episode in the war. Nukzar, being the brave man he is, laughs at me. He tells me about his first assignment and how, when he'd reached his destination, he realized he'd made a circle and returned to the starting point. He tells me no glorious stories about himself and described no difficulties of war.

That day they are fixing the hut's roof. In the center of the hut, there is a big furnace and a table that is always set. The bearded troopers come here to eat all day long. Olga is the woman of the house. She is a philologist from Sergiev Posad, Moscow Region. She met Nukzar in Sukhumi. They had a house and three children; Georgy, the youngest, was born when the war was in full swing. During the bombing, when there was no light in the hospital, Nukzar brought in a generator. Other women were giving birth in the darkness. One of them couldn't deliver because she was so petrified. The child died. "It was her first child," Olga observes.

⁴ A village in Kodori Gorge

Like many other refugees, Olga and Nukzar are indifferent to material things and don't like to talk about them. Olga couldn't remember anything that she was missing. Azhara is a village. These children of a physicist and a philologist, who once received their education in the capital, now attend a village school. When I ask Olga, if she regrets this fact, she at first she doesn't understand my question. "Oh, you are talking about education? Svanian? In the village? Why? They are the children of Svan. But that's not the point. The point is that we are all alive. Do you understand? All of us. We have two books that mama sent to us. No, we are not sorry. We are not afraid to die. After crossing the pass, I am no longer afraid of anything. I remember how we walked on the road lit by the lights of a bus. It was hard but Nukzar told me then that we are no different than everybody else. And this remark made everything clear for me. Nothing that was important before has any real value now. I don't believe in national conflicts. This is political games."

She laughs as she tells me how the UN reporters were looking for the house of the legendary Pangani: "Is it the house of Pangani?"

"Yes, it is."

"This is HIS house?!" the voice of the speaker breaks in doubt as he sees the small hut. "And where is the wife of Pangani?"

"I am the wife of Pangani," I was standing in a pair of men's boots with the plow behind my back, the wife of a legend. They imagined that we must be living in a mansion with a pool. She laughs.

Some people leave and others come. We drink to those who have left and never come back. "To those who are no longer with us," say the Svans.

Among the newcomers, I find a young Russian doctor, Alyosha Zverev, from Kolomen-skoe in Moscow.⁵ He is a graduate of Sechensky Medical College and has worked in Kamchatka and in Chernobyl. Alyosha has a family. Some Georgians once offered to take care of his family if he would accept a doctor's position in Kodori Gorge. Alexsei went to the Gorge and moved in with one of the locals. Another Svan gave up his house to be used as a hospital. He doesn't make any money; he eats at his host's table. "I like it here. I have learned their manners and customs. It's a very complex and interesting nation. I manage to find privacy with the patients, otherwise they all get into the room. It's a disaster when they come to me with a sack and ask for medication. I tell them I cannot give them a sack-full! I shall stay here for another year. They can't live here without a doctor. They get sick often because of the stress. And their life is a constant stress."

⁵ A region in the southern part of Moscow, on the right bank of Moscow River.

I was curious why the surgeon Zverev wouldn't go to the peace-support forces or Red Cross to get money. "Those who wish to make money don't go there. I hope you didn't come here to make money." Indeed I didn't. Alyosha received me in his neat and orderly workplace. He measured my blood pressure; it was 180/100. He gave me some medicine and we parted. My dear Russian soul, where has life driven you? Doctor Zverev is their only hope.

I saw Alyosha once more in our Gentsvishi. Two sisters, both over eighty, went to the forest to prepare firewood for the winter. Babutza, accidentally got stuck in a tree crevice and as the tree bent it fractured her hip. Sveta heard someone crying, and we went to see. The whole village was already there. Some brought cheese, sour milk, and vodka for the compress. They collected gasoline by cups and plates from every household to take Babutza to the doctor.

The children and I visit the old woman everyday. The children know that they cannot pass the house of a sick person. Georgia is rich with rituals. That is one. The fact that rituals are in their blood makes it seem natural to Georgians. The rest of us must master them. Sveta's children taught me how to walk into the home of a sick person, and what to say, and what to avoid doing.

The next day we went to Azhara to swap a bull for a cow. Every evening we climb the mountains to look for our cows. For the first time, I saw the cow-climbers. The girls showed me the local pride – a water-powered electricity plant. There had been no electricity for a long time, until each village decided to build a plant on its own.

We climbed to the reservoir to watch water fall fiercely into the engine shop. As the door of the shop was unlocked, we entered. I was surprised the door wasn't secured. Nodar explained that if it was closed, Svans would break in to see what's inside. The fact that it is open makes it uninteresting. "But you are a good sport, Elvira, that you entered. See that light?" At the end of a long wire there is a lamp bulb. Bulbs are a terrible deficit here. But every village in Kodori Gorge has a light.

I didn't hide the fact that I was afraid to cross the pass by car. My fear appeared the day after our arrival. Every day it grew stronger. How I was to get out is a mystery. The snow began, and we had to hurry. Suddenly I got a crazy idea. It was that time of day (there is no dusk) when daylight abruptly turns into night. The night falls from the mountains, giving you no time to reflect. Sveta and the kids walk me to Nodar. We walk with a twisted paper torch and I think aloud: what if I stay here for a year, one complete year and work at the local school as a Russian language teacher. True, I don't have the money and many other things; I don't have the courage to accept it all either. What stopped me? I dropped the torch and stumbled over a big rock.

Gioni once told me, “When you die we won’t learn where you are. When we die you won’t know about it either.” These words might seem strange to those who never lived in Kodori Gorge. I lived there. I understand what he meant. Here in the Gorge there are no empty encounters. Here “the day is longer than a century.”

Children of Kodori Gorge

“It all happened on August 14. We were at home in Sukhumi. The terrifying shooting began. A ship entered Sukhumi port and started bombing the city and the nearest districts. We were afraid and hid in a bomb shelter. My uncle came. He sat us in the car and took us away. There were many other people besides us. Sukhumi fell a year later. It all happened in 1993.”

Nanuli Gulbani, 14 years old

“In this terrible war I lost the person closest to me, my mother. I lost her when I needed her most. I also lost my older brother. He fought and died. He was so young that he didn’t have a mustache or beard. He went to defend our family. It was a terrible tragedy. It drew a line in my heart. Couldn’t something have been done to prevent this terrifying war? Our souls are destroyed!”

Maya Gudzhedzhiani, 13 years old

“The fall of Sukhumi. On September 16, 1993, the war resumed. On September 27 at 3:00 p.m. Sukhumi fell. We had lost Abkhazia. The warmest city on earth was struck by flames and filled with open-eyed corpses. These terrible minutes are impossible to forget. I will never forget them in all my life.”

Nana Okrashidze, 15 years old

“The war was in progress in Sukhumi. I had a terrible toothache. In the morning mama took me to the dentist. The dentist called me a hero because I was in the city during the bombing. I wouldn’t leave even if I was dying. The dentist took the tooth out. Mama walked out with me; bombs were falling on the roofs. Mama was very scared. She tried to cover me up, thinking that she would save me that way. I felt us both shaking. The streets were full of the dead. Houses were burning. We survived by accident. It was the most terrifying day of my life.”

Levan Pirveli, 15 years old

“When the war between Abkhazians and Georgians began, I was in the second grade. It was a sick, fixed war. Till today there is no end to people’s suffering. Hungry, barefooted people are scattered beyond the borders of their countries. I still wish to go home and to go back to my old school. I don’t consider this school to be mine.”

Sofiko Chapliani, 11 years old

“In March 1994 the villages of Kodori Gorge were bombed. Papa was in the battlefield. Mama didn’t know where to hide with us. We ran into the forest. I went through so much I thought that life was over already. I understood that the enemy was absolutely indifferent about whom to bomb and where to bomb.”

Sofiko Dzhadshviani, 13 years old

Farewell

I am leaving. A brother of the three sisters, also a refugee, is taking his 1972 Zhiguli to Tbilisi on a truck. The car is idle. It is attached to the body of the ZIS-66 with a pulling hoist. The back header is open. We have to sit inside the automobile, so we won’t see the mtebi (Svanian for mountains). Rezo Kvanchiani, who is taking us, is a handsome fellow; he comes from Kutaisi. The day before he brought caskets from Tbilisi. Memorials were held at the home of one of Choplianies. Rezo is a refugee; he has three children and his house was burned, but the habits of his bright Sukhumi life remain with him. What’s the difference if you eat from fine china or plastic plates? He wants to eat as he did in his former life. It is as though he challenges the life he has now by living the way he used to. Rezo will never get over his loss. His wife Dali said of him that “his heart is with Abkhazia.”

Rezo is a virtuoso driver. During the late dinner he joked, drank, and fooled around, but in the morning you wouldn’t recognize the man: he was concentrated, sober and strict. I have noticed that there are nations where people can be characterized by changes in their behavioral type. Sometimes the change is so spontaneous it all happens in one act. That’s why you so often feel foolish. Here you are, finally accepting the game and... boom! You see a completely different individual with an opposite emotional spectrum. What is behind this behavioral gift – temper, mentality or some other element of psychology. One thing is clear, you should give up your carefree Russian ways and be ready to adapt to dramatic swings.

Farewells for those who are about to cross the pass is a special ritual. Everyone stands in silence. There are no meaningless remarks. The silence creates a powerful tension, interrupted inevitably by a child’s cry or a dog’s bark. The men watch the loading and securing of things. From early morning, neighbors come to say goodbye. Sveta, Gioni and the children were the first to come say goodbye to me. The children handed me a piece of paper with a prayer to guard me on my way. “We carried it on our way through Sukhumi,” Sveta says. I unfold the paper and see only two sentences: “I have been saved from fear. Jesus had saved me from fear.” Oh, my God! This is a pure incantation. And it’s in the past perfect: *had saved!* Salvation that had already happened. God! How badly they must have felt during the bombings and air raids. What am I afraid of?

Marina Georgadze came by with her child to say goodbye. Her relatives are going to ride with us in the Zhiguli. Marina's story is as tragic as thousands of others. She and her husband left their house on September 29, 1993, hoping to get to Ochamchir. Marina was seven months pregnant. Her young husband, a first time father-to-be, told her to walk slower because her legs were swollen. Shooting began within 200 meters from them and Marina's husband had to join in the battle. She never heard more of him.

For fifteen days, she hid in the forest. On October 24 she reached Hobi in West Georgia and delivered her son. "I always kept my hand on my stomach. Can't remember why, but I remember this gesture very well. Oh, what a son I received from God! It was cold and raining during my labor, but I didn't notice anything. The hardest thing in life is waiting. I've heard rumors that my husband was captured in Ochamchir and other things too. You know, the scariest thing is if he died and never knew that he has this beautiful baby boy Georgy."

Marina's father stayed behind in the village. She had heard that he was killed. When he walked into the house, Marina nearly went mad. Marina hopes that I will help her to get some news about her husband. She recalls Abkhazian last names. Are Abkhazians the enemies? "No, no, we will need each other again. If they knew my hardships, they would help. Maybe we are the way we are because we lived side by side with them. They are very warm people."

And at that moment, I realize that these local wars have destroyed the finest socio-ethnic structures. Georgians neighboring with Abkhazians, Armenians in Baku, Armenians living close to Abkhazia. The complex cultural interactions among nations enriched ethnical traits by adding new content. This longing for Abkhazia, as strange as it may seem, is not only the longing for palms and beaches. It is a longing for a coexistence with the warm Abkhazian nation. Who knows, maybe within these new ethnical transformations, we were able to progress by looking in the mirror of another nation.

Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman⁶ developed a cultural concept explaining that during nuclear expansion, the nucleus collides with foreign particles at the boarder resulting in a new cultural phenomenon. What if this statement is also true for the life of a group? In this case, war deprives nations of valuable border contact, destroying ethnic formations and cutting off cultural channels for interaction.

In this trip, I revised my attitude toward the *disparaging imperial Russian language*. This Russian language was spoken by tens of nationalities in Sukhumi. It definitely performed a cultural function.

⁶ Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman (1922-1993) – Russian critic, semiotician, founder of structural semiotics in culturology.

I don't know why Russia fought with its former republics. But it fought on all post-Soviet territories. This is perhaps the saddest truth that I carry with me from the sites of battle.

Everything is set. We are about to move on, and I say a prayer aloud. Just the thought that I will never see Sveta again makes me panic. I reach nervously into my bag and take out the new jacket that I bought in the Georgian market. I throw it to Sveta.

“It looked so good on you,” she cries. The jacket falls into Gioni’s hands and I hear him repeating: “We will never know out where you’re going to die. You will never find out where we are going to die.” Everybody – Poliska, the mother of three girls and a son, Dali, the teacher and others – are sobbing quietly. We are leaving Gentsvishi where I lived a life filled with fears, suffering, rapture and blinding beauty. Nowhere else have I stood so close to the stars as in Kodori Gorge.

And I am taking with me the Svanian phrase: “*Variant mamli*” – “*No other option.*” Is it really this way? It cannot be!

* * *

This time the road is more dangerous. We literally have to make our path. Put one boulder to another and push. Being pressed together in a small car for 14 hours is a psychological test. I am sitting next to an old man, Akaky, and two Georgian women with a five-year-old kid. The women don’t speak Russian, yet they are always asking questions about the “*Russeti*” (the Russian). “Does the Russian woman want to eat?” Akaky couldn’t keep up with all of their concerns for my well-being. Five-year-old Georgy took the road stoically, without a whine. It’s not his first trip to his grandparents.

Sometimes the car would slide and we would yell at the top of our lungs, because no one wanted to die. When we arrived in Chuberi that night, I went to the plywood refugee shelter. Everybody had gathered around a television set to watch the movie director Eldar Ryazanov and the actor Zinovy Gerdt converse. They sat on a lounge in the studio surrounded by blooming trees. Ryazanov asked Gerdt is he happy with the changes in the country, and Gerdt answers “yes.” Small children prowl at our feet while we freeze in front of the TV in stupor. No one understands what those nice gentlemen are talking about. I feel like I have lost track myself.

At that moment, I recall my favorite student, Misha Udanin, a desperate fighter for justice. He followed Galich, Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn. He was almost arrested in the post office for telegraphing film director Emil Shengelaya. “Amiran will spread his wings; Georgia will be free.” They thought it was a secret code. Later, near the memorial to Lenin, Misha was beaten. Major Taraskin promised to “beat the crap out of you next time.” The KGB kept a case on him. While I was teaching a class, for instance, the

door would open and an officer would yell, “Udanin to Investigator Bakhirev!” The class would burst out in laughter, but there is nothing very funny at all in a real KGB cellar.

In the sixth year of democracy in Russia, Misha’s parents wanted to take him away to Israel. The day before their departure, his four best friends came to my house. They had known each other since childhood. And they loved one another very much. They cried because they knew they were parting forever. As they left my building around 1 a.m., they were taken to the precinct. When the militiamen twisted their arms, Misha yelled, “Take me to isolation! I will not go to Israel.” But Misha left anyway. So did some of his friends. In hopes of saving their young lives, their parents sent them away to Catholic colleges in Poland.

Later, Misha, that furious adversary of dictatorship, wrote me a long letter from Israel in response to what I had written about the Georgian-Abkhazian War. I had told him the story of a Georgian girl who was nearly shot by Abkhazian pursuers. Misha responded that it would have been better to maintain the social regime that we had opposed. “The dissenters would be in jail. You and I would never have had a chance to read Nabokov. The secretary-general would hook medal after a medal to his own feeble chest. But an old man, killed for no reason, would be alive. And mothers wouldn’t go mad with the grief of losing their sons. And your Georgian girl wouldn’t have had to hide in the woods for days.”

I am to sleep at the old woman Hatuna’s home. She was one of the 1993 victims; her house was burned, and she crossed the pass with other refugees. Her husband died of sorrow. Hatuna’s face was paralyzed, and now she wears sunglasses to hide her inverted eye. Hatuna is glad that she will not be alone tonight. She suffers from automatism, an illness described by Carl Jung. Hatuna’s previous automated reactions continue to exist despite their irrelevance to her current situation; they paralyze her will. She exists without hope, desire and reasonable reactions. Not all refugees are like that; far from it. Some are just the opposite: they develop hyperactivity to create the appearance a normal life for themselves and others around them.

Hatuna searches stubbornly for the bed linen she doesn’t have. She grabs the cup of tea that doesn’t exist. Finally, she interrupts her efforts and throws herself down on her bed. That’s all! Nothing more than sorrow – one damn sorrow and an eye that twitches unceasingly beneath a black glass.

I fall onto the bed and listen to her endless story of why us and what for through the entire night.

You are right, Misha, it would have been better if that period of stagnation had lasted, if Hatuna had her house and her family. I don’t want these changes. I don’t want them and I’m ashamed of them.

* * *

We arrive in Kutaisi. I am not in a hurry to catch the bus. Rezo Kvanchiani, our driver, turned forty today. His big family occupies several rooms in a half-ruined five-story building on the outskirts of the city. The gaps in the cold concrete walls allow the wind to creep inside. There is no water and no bathroom, so families used the facilities in a building nearby. A part of the building is under construction. There are rumors that it is going to be a custom's or business office. Rezo's mother-in-law and I make a daring late night trip to the construction site. We discover high ceilings, floors, doors and even window frames.

Refugees often suffer from post war syndrome. It is quite destructive. When people suffer collectively, equal circumstances seem to unite everyone. When peace comes, social inequalities reassert themselves and bring great moral suffering. Refugees can cope with losing a house, but they cannot understand why their children are hungry and lack books when someone is building luxury cottages as though war never happened and no one had died. Refugees from Mardakert in Nagorny Karabakh and Chuberi in Georgia share a common resentment that their motherland allows such injustices. Wrathful outbursts disturb already unstable psychological conditions. Suppressed anger can be shocking. I've met young people in Kutaisi who are loaded with sicknesses caused by stress. Huge, expensive office projects are in process while these young people have no jobs, no public assistance and no health care. No one cares for the refugees' children.

Dali, Rezo's wife, warms water in a bucket and places it on the cement floor. One-by-one she begins washing her three children: 10-year-old Dato, 9-year-old Asmat and 5-year-old Kaha. She must hurry before the water becomes cold. Then all three children climb beneath the rag that was once a blanket. Dali meticulously irons their school uniforms and hangs the white ribbons as though nothing bad has ever happened. Later, I would learn the price of Dali's coolness.

I ask Dali to draw her house in Laty. The children are helping. Dato fusses because Dali didn't draw the garden paths. "They were there, I know they were. I walked there," the child was sobbing. Watching a mother and her children reconstruct the memories of their home on paper and listening to them talk about it is not for the faint-hearted. I was confused by Dali's story until I realized that after leaving Laty they went back. Why? You could have been killed. "But this is our house; we wanted to see it again..."

"Wasn't it dangerous?"

"It was. But we wanted to go home." It was useless and foolish to ask more questions.

Dali told me about a detail she couldn't let go. She was at the market during the bombing. She was holding a pear as hard as a rock in her hand. Dali opened the door of her car for shelter from the bombs. Later she realized that something was leaking through her fingers. It was that pear, squeezed with unimagined strength. "How could that happen? Why didn't I throw it out? Why squeeze it? I don't remember."

For a long time, six-year-old Asmat couldn't speak. She opened her mouth and her tongue wouldn't follow. They thought it would always be like this.

Many small children are haunted by obsessive thoughts at night. Kaha can't put out of his mind the fact that he left his toy car unwashed in the garage: "Mama, Mama, when we go back, can I wash my car? Is it still going to be there?" It resembles a psychological condition. The abruptly interrupted act can become a bright memory. This happens during normal interruptions. In this case, however, war interrupted their everyday functioning. The ordinary has become a disturbing memory.

"We didn't think about saving our things. We only thought about how to survive. But when we started living a new life, we caught ourselves missing the things we needed most. At first it aroused panic, and I hid my head under the pillow each night so the kids couldn't hear me weep. Then I started convincing myself that everything was all right. We had to move on; otherwise, we were doomed." I noticed that many women refugees develop the habit of keeping their homes in perfect order. I believe it prevents them from going mad. This order maintains a fragile sanity that is ready to collapse at any moment.

The grownups were setting the table while the children and I were playing. The oldest one has begun forgetting Russian; the youngest never spoke it. In a Russian textbook, I found a silly bit of poetry:

Pretty, cute hen I had
Boy, oh, boy was it smart!

No great Russian poets were included. In the children's heads, Russia is associated with bombs, warplanes and that smart little hen. Nothing more!

We memorize this rhyme and make up a game of gestures. During this game, I dare to ask Dato a real question. I asked why he is in this room. "Because Abkhazians kicked us out."

"What should we do to make peace with them?"

"Kill them all." I remember his tone. I heard the same tone and saw the same eyes in

Tarkovsky's film *Ivan's Childhood*.⁷ I am terrified recalling the movie's end. I feel pain and guilt for little pained Dato.

At the table, the conversation turns naturally to our former motherland. We speak of Moscow, which everybody loves, and St. Petersburg, which many have visited. We remember our songs, our discussions and our darn leaders. As strange as it may sound, thanks to Russian language and a life we once shared, we are all still brothers and sisters. Yes, Rezo is my brother and Dali is my sister. My sister. With this feeling, I return to Tbilisi.

The Children of Shusha

Druzhba Narodov, № 11, 1997

GURGEN Nalbandyan is 35. He is a math teacher. He fought in the war, has four children and walks with a cane. I asked him the same question that I asked people in Tzkhinvali, Sukhumi, Grozny: how is it possible to teach tangents and cotangents to children who have experienced a war as though nothing has happened? Other teachers have told me that the children have changed already, and their new experience counts off from death and destruction.”

“I trick them,” Gurgun says. “There is no other way.” I was trying to understand whether he is really as light-hearted as he seems. “No, I'm not, but that is not the children's fault.” Gurgun's mother was burned. His father wanted to take her remains into the house, but he was captured with four other villagers. Gurgun hasn't heard from him since.

I pull out a notebook to record the information. It is what I have been doing all the way through my trip. Gurgun takes away my notebook and in his own hand records his parents' names, the place of tragedy and the date: June 13, 1992. I know that looking for the whereabouts of these people is useless, yet I continue to do it, and I make others do it too. As my friend Nelya Loginova put it, “When we are degraded to the size of a molecule, we are left with only one option – to send someone a signal.”

The war has spawned a new business, trading in people. There is a famous dealer in Shusha who is called Phantomas. His business is nothing unusual there.

* * *

“I was born in Stepanakert and lived there for five years. When the war began, my mother took me to my uncle's in Yerevan. She and my younger brother stayed in Step-

⁷ A twelve year-old Russian boy-soldier is tortured and killed by Germans during WWII.

anakert, which had been bombed. They ran to the forest where they had to sleep on the grass. In Yerevan we suffered from hunger. We had no light, no gas. We could only buy a half of a loaf of bread and some potatoes, which they sold for coupons.

“My father was wounded. When I saw him walking with a crutch I understood why my mother was acting so weird – she wanted to hide it from me.

“One Sunday, I went to pray. I saw the sad faces around me. I understood why. I was taken back to Stepanakert. They started bombing the city. Every time I heard shooting, I would go blue in the face and my tongue became numb. My father went back to war.”

Kristina Avanesyan, 15 years old

“January 26, 1992, when Azerbaijani Special Forces invaded Karin-Tag, was the hardest day of my life. Once we climbed on top of a hill and watched Azeris bomb Stepanakert. My father was killed on February 19. The next year, in August, my younger brother was wounded in the eye. That night, they bombed Stepanakert from Agdam. When Shusha was cleared, we return to our grandpa’s house that we are now reconstructing.”

Gagik Bageryan, 15 years old

“In June 1992 we became homeless. So did our grandmother. She always cried. When we left our house, she looked at the abandoned rooms and said, ‘Oh, God! Help my children!’ The worst came later.

“I saw people throw themselves into the river to escape the brutal Azerbaijani men who pursued them. Those who could swim, were swimming; those who couldn’t – asked for God’s mercy. One kid fell into the river. His mother cried out and looked around. It seemed she had gone mad. But it lasted only for a moment. Suddenly, she started running along the riverside to get the child. A Russian soldier jumped into the river. Fighting with the stream, he finally got the child out.

“The boy in the soldier’s hands was dead. I remember this clearly.”

Nune Mirzabekian, seventh grade

“I was born in Baku. I only finished the first grade; after that we had to escape. We came to Kirovakan where we experienced an earthquake. We moved to Karabakh. Two years later my father was killed in Mardakert. It happened on January 6, 1994.

“He left six girls behind. We were playing in the yard when I heard a cry. When I walked into the house, my grandmother said, ‘My daughter’s life is ruined.’ I asked what had

happened, but my uncle's wife said, 'Nothing.' I remembered that when my father's brother got killed, they also said that nothing had happened. I understood that my father had died. I fainted. I couldn't believe it. It has been more than a year since I have said the word papa. Those who didn't go through that, I hope they do.

"After my uncle's death, his daughter was born. He left his marriage ring to his wife before his death. This is the only relic in the house. The children kiss the ring. My grandmother has lost two sons."

Susana Avanesian, ninth grade

* * *

The teacher: "Let's talk about the meaning of life."

The student: "A plane will pass now and there will be no life and no meaning."

Conversation during a class

* * *

They fainted when they found out about the death of their father.

They turned blue in the face and lost their speech from fear.

They learned to be patient and wait for death.

They remember what happened to their grandma, grandpa, brother, sister, aunt and uncle, neighbor and friend.

They know that it was not only their father who died, but someone's son and brother.

They learned to read between the lines for the signs and gestures that grownups exchanged with one another.

They know how to tell a missile from a bomb.

They are the children of Karabakh. If we believe the words of their teacher, who lost her son in the war, they carry darkness in their souls. But if it is so, why are they so thirsty for knowledge and so passionate in their prayers?

* * *

Veronika Voskanyan plays a record to her granddaughter at night. It's a touching Armenian song about a crane. It was her son Alik's lullaby. This music holds strong attraction

for Lilia, Alik's daughter. "How did she find out?" Veronika asks me in the dark. Life goes on becoming stronger and wiser despite all the wars outside.

* * *

The neighbor's baby is crying. I run to comfort her. The baby's mother, Liza, is not in a hurry: "Let him cry, I'll listen. When a baby cries, it's happiness for Armenians. That means he is alive!"

* * *

"You know what was scariest when we came out of the cellars? We were only able to recognize each other by the sound of our voices. "Is it you Karina?" or "Oh, Sonya, is it really you?" It changed us right off the bat. There is nothing scarier."

From the story of a retired woman

On the fourth floor of the house where I am staying, a quiet wedding is in progress. There is no party and no music. A year ago the groom's aunt lost her son in the war. Lubov Nersesovna, the mother of the dead young man, is wearing black. Her son was born on September 1, the first day of school; for her it is the day of death. The mother of the groom stops at the portrait of her nephew: "They have the same boys out there," she pointed toward Azerbaijan.

* * *

I was walking along the Stepanakert streets. High up, perhaps at the ninth-floor level, a rope had been stretched over the street. I saw pieces of material on the rope and big letters. At first I thought it was a commercial, and then I read: Gagik, 19 years old, Hachik, 20 years old, Gurgen, 23 years old, Slavik, 29 years old. The sky was wired with death calls. I couldn't look up anymore.

* * *

I was coming back at dusk. Totally lost, couldn't find the house. Suddenly I saw a man sneaking around the corner, his empty backpack hanging behind. "Where are you coming from?" I asked.

"From the garden."

"Is it far?"

"About 15 kilometers."

"Why is your backpack empty then?"

"I planted cucumbers, tomatoes and everything is gone," he stands there with a strained smile."

Maybe I didn't get something? "What do you mean, nothing?"

"Well, someone... but really No-th-ing!"

And just like that, we were standing there laughing together. Here in Nagorny Karabakh this foolish laughter means a lot: We are alive, you and I; we are alive!

* * *

"Victoria, look, the house is on fire!" I yell. Heavy smoke is coming from the fourth floor. On the fifth floor balcony, a young man and woman are having a peaceful conversation.

"That is not a fire, Elvira. They are cooking and the furnace is fuming. The people on the fifth floor are used to it. The smoke means nothing; they are still going to be alive, they have nothing to worry about."

I hope they'll be alive.

* * *

My landlady, Victoria, says that some Armenians have even wallpapered their cellars. They think they might have to stay there for some years. There is a saying about people of Karabakh: The brave ones have left. Those who are not afraid of anything are still here.

They are really are not afraid of anything.

* * *

Sonia, Khachatur Grigorian's granddaughter, was twelve when the war began. She lives in Martuni. We met at her grandfather's house in Stepanakert.

"In the beginning it was beautiful," she says, "you don't get it yet that death has come for you."

"What was it like, Sonia?"

"You want to hear about the missile or the bombs?"

"Sonia, didn't you want to leave?"

"No, I realized that we have to be patient and wait."

"Wait for what?"

"For death. What else? When they killed our neighbors, I thought, why are we better? They were also Armenians just like us. We can die too."

“How about running?”

“There is nowhere to run to. This is the only land we have.”

“When the Turks started bombing...”

“What Turks, Sonia? You mean 1915?”

“Yes, in 1915 and now.”

She said it as though she had lived in 1915 just as in 1992. “Every time they fired, they reminded us that we are Armenians,” she said when she was leaving.

The war destroys national DNA. For some reason, they call them local wars here, but the outcome is GLOBAL.

* * *

“What is that?” Alik asks his daughter, pointing to a bus.

“It is a heavy tank,” she answers.

* * *

Now I know exactly the last memories I shall have before my death. I will see a valley between the mountains, a donkey walking across the shaky bridge and a handful of radishes wet with the tears of an Armenian man.

Alik Voskanian surprised me with this mountain valley before I left. He showed me the natural mineral water fountain that his father had found. Alik’s father had spent his life as a drill operator, looking for oil in the Caspian. He was one of the best masters, and he worked in the deepest places. Besides the precise calculations that are required for this work, one has to have intuition about the behavior of oil under water. Zaven, Alik’s father, came from Baku to Nagorny Karabakh to search for sources of water and discovered many in Karabakh. I was astonished at the sensitivity of his ear to the hidden treasures of the earth. This mineral water fountain is Zaven’s child.

Night was falling. A loaded donkey was dragging his burden slowly down the mountain. A man accompanied the donkey. When we met and the man learned that I was a Russian visitor, he opened his sack, took a handful of radishes and handed them to me. Then he seemed to think it wasn’t enough and reached inside again, grabbing as many as he could. By this time, I knew how valuable this little crop was to people here. I wanted to spend some time with the man, so I began to ask him about his life. Mixing Armenian and Russian, the man told me about the death of his only son. Now he and his wife are all alone. He wanted to tell me something else, but his words crumbled and suddenly he started to cry. He wiped his tears with the hand that had just held the

radishes and it covered his face with mud. But he couldn't stop crying. He turned into an old man before my eyes. Then, helpless to continue, he waived his hand weakly and stepped away. I watched him go. He turned from the path and soon a mountain hid him. I cannot stop asking myself whether the state's independence was worth the life of this peasant's son.

It is always the same when you leave Karabakh. Here you are, philosophical and aloof, watching the mountains and the stars and then ... bang! Some unexpected encounter is bound to happen. Grief here is so real, so unbearable, that it takes hold of your heart and never lets go. Is this really the destiny of Karabakh? Is it?

Malik Do! (An Angel Exists!) (Chechnya)

Druzhiba Narodov, № 4, 1998

“OH, Allah! For the sake of the babies who cannot speak, for the sake of our elderly who are bedridden, for the sake of the birds and the animals who do not speak our language, stop this war.”

Badueva Fatima

“Oh, Allah! Our eyes cannot stop crying for two years now. Aren't these enough tears and blood from our mothers, sisters, brothers, our closest people?”

Arsalikova Heda

“Oh, Allah! Oh, people, help! For two years, the red color in the road reminds us of blood. Please let us live as we can and finish school.”

Bekaeva Heda

“Please, take away the war. We love our motherland.”

Fatima

This is a cry for help. This is a prayer. They wrote these words in front of my eyes, the little children of Achkhoy-Martana. Their teacher's name is Raisa Vakhaevna Gairakhanova. When I asked her if the children were first graders or second graders, she said: “They are innocent creatures.” I knew how it sounds in Chechen: Malik do! (An angel exists!)

Yes, an angel exists, but life does not.

Asking children to write about what has happened is an incomparable mission. My first experiences in the ruined city of Grozny in 1995 convinced me that children are wiser

than adults. It also reinforced my belief that the process of writing is not a way to forget. Instead, it is a way to find a companion capable of understanding.

Nevertheless, the beginning is always tough. It is not easy to receive a testimonial in place of grief. The most unexpected reactions present themselves. And they are righteous reactions, I'll tell you.

In all my experience, only once did a student, a ninth grader, ask to take his paper home. The next day he brought his treatise back to school. In his father's thoughts, he described how the Russians had betrayed them. He gave his composition to the assistant principal and waited for her reaction. She explained gently that she understood the mood in his family, but he should have tried to write his own thoughts.

I asked my friend Khasmagomet, the school principal, whether he believes in a Chechen victory in this war. He said that I had framed the question incorrectly. "The question is not about a Chechen victory over Russia. It is that this time, Russia did not win over Chechnya."

I have asked many people in Chechnya this same question: grownups and children, soldiers and civilians. I swear, not one Chechen ever told me that Chechnya was victorious over Russia. Sometimes people responded with a rhetorical question, "What is Chechnya and what is Russia?" Sometimes they shook their heads helplessly, "What victory are you talking about where there is so much loss?" So if in these essays, you come across an attempt to find out who won over whom – this is just a reaction to the conversation I had with Khasmagomet.

In these essays you will notice "And the rest....?" This is the first thing I thought to ask in the schools of Achkhoy-Martana, Samashki and Grozny.

"The rest is silence." These words from Hamlet appeared by themselves after bloody August 1996, when my eyes met those of the children of Chechnya. It is no exaggeration to say that I was struck speechless. Although I am a teacher, I have never been so limited with words. One wrong step and I could have ended up in the kingdom of lies and platitudes.

Paradoxically, there has never been a place where I could begin a conversation more quickly than in Chechnya. Although people saw me for the first time, they spoke with me as though they had known me all their lives. "You can't imagine, Elvira Nikolae-na..." "Remember you said..." "If you could only see my grandmother...." "Thank you for being here..." "Thank you for asking us..." "If this is not your last time coming, thank you!" "Thank you very much for giving us a chance to say what we feel." "I am sorry for the mistakes." "Sorry for the mess...." and finally, the one that stunned me most: "Sorry. In this war I forgot to write correct."

I Think I Got Killed in This War

Novaya Gazeta, January 20, 2000

Field notes from Novaya Gazeta's columnist Elvira Goryukhina

YOU are probably surprised that Goryukhina hasn't written anything. She returned from her beloved Caucasus and remains silent.

I became silent back in Ingushetia, when I saw my friends in the tent camps. I knew then that I would not write anything, that maybe I would stop writing for good.

I think I got killed in this war.

Just as they killed those who had to walk two miles to get a little water, return to the tent, swaddle their sick children in rugs, and for a long time look straight ahead without blinking. Psychologists call it "zero condition." There is no longer any sense behind their actions because all their senses have been destroyed.

There were three of us in Chechnya: our reporters Izmailov and Mikhailich and me. All of us had been to war before. Nothing could possibly surprise us. In October I marked my tenth year of traveling through places of war. I am trying to explain that I noticed something in this war that I hadn't noticed in any of the others. The faces of my Chechen friends, their bodies in repose had changed totally. The way the women stand and how they hold their babies is different now. I don't know if it's depression or something else. But I can tell you that such an experiment with a nation is a crime against humanity.

This war has taken all of their vital strength. You cannot force people into exile twice, three times, saying that it's for their own good.

When she hears the roar of the plane's engine, two-year-old Madina asks her mother, "Are there people or bombs on the plane?"

"Go to sleep baby, there are bombs there...go to sleep."

But the child cannot sleep. The whirl of the plane above, the fear, causes her to go into convulsions.

And now what? Should we begin describing the sufferings of each child and each old man we encounter, the way we did in 1995 and 1996?

Whom should we tell? To whom should we address this matter if everywhere we face the giant wall of lies and hypocrisy? The problems within our government are hidden behind this wall. A meager teacher's salary is nothing compared with the victorious movement of our army. The faces of the same generals appear on the stage. These are the same general who told the mothers of Russian soldiers who were searching for their sons in 1996 that "captives are used material."

Karabulak's tent

As always, our assistance is addressed to someone specific. We are looking for our friends. It is dark already. It is freezing cold. No matter how much we try to warm up, it is still cold deep inside of us. Karabulak's tents resemble burial mounds. It is a horrible scene.

We are looking for our friend Aslambek Dombayev. He is the principal of a boarding school. Last year we brought humanitarian aid to Grozny. Dombayev was a high-class educator. During the First Chechen War, he went throughout Grozny in a truck fishing children out of cellars. He took the Russian kids; he took the Chechen kids. A year ago he was still active and full of strength. His educational and human energy were astonishing.

We circle around and go back to Narzan. Finally, we find the boarding school. And here it all begins. During all these years of traveling through war zones, I have become experienced at starting conversations with people I do not know.

I recall that a few years ago a little Ingushetian girl, Asya, couldn't agree with me on the word refugee. She linked the word directly to her own reality: "Refugee is when you run and get somewhere. We are nowhere, we can't get anywhere. Get it? We are *wanderers* because we *wander around*."

The wanderer Dombayev was sitting in the corner of a wooden summer house, warming his hands on a radiator. The radiator was almost cold. Our driver and guard were already standing in the doorway, but Aslambek didn't recognize us.

"This is me, Ismailov!"

"This is me, Elvira! Remember we came to Grozny before?"

He wrinkled his forehead but looked past us at the driver and the guard who carried the shotgun. "Yes, yes, I know Slava, Elvira," he seemed absentminded. "But who are they? Slava, I'm afraid of them." He said it twice, clearly, word by word. Roza, his wife, tried to calm him.

Slava knew that teachers here don't get their salaries, and he handed them the money that *Novaya Gazeta's* readers had donated." They cried and thanked us. To hear appreciation, knowing the hell they are living through, is a bitter thing.

In another of the cold little houses, Zalina, a student at Grozny Medical College, was lying sick with the flu. She was burning with fever, but no one could help her. There was no medicine, no heat. Larisa, Zalina's mother, is a teacher. She is not crying any longer, just looking and looking at Zalina.

"I am nobody now," says Zalina.

That's fever, I thought. But Larisa explains that Zalina has no school documents, no passport. She literally does not exist. "We are all of us nobody," Larissa says to calm her sick daughter.

I sit there and whisper: "Let the flu leave Zalina and pass to Elvira ..."

We leave and as we walk outside, Roza says: "We feel very sorry for you out there." I tell her that we are all right, and ask why she feels sorry? "You are not well because of what we feel toward you," she answers.

I have found the right word. It is HATRED. Chechens can sense it with their skin. We Russians are united by our hatred. This is possibly the biggest human catastrophe that we have to bear for taking this way out.

We travel through Sleptzovsk and Karabulak, looking for the Idigov family. You know them. Lechi, who heads the household, helped us rescue those who had been captured. He stayed with us in someone else's home and tried to do everything he could so that we felt safe. Lechi was taking a big risk every time he sheltered us.

I recall, for some reason, how Lechi saved Izmailov and me. We had brought humanitarian aid. The Chechens decided to investigate the legal aspects of our action. A government official got on the phone to Shamil Basayev.⁸ And then it was left to Lechi to have an eye-to-eye conversation with Basayev's assistant. When they finished, Lechi was unrecognizable. He was enraged; his face was all covered with red spots.

Our Chechen friends were waiting for us downstairs. Ruslan, our driver was among them. "They won't take you away," he said, "no one will." He was holding a grenade in his hand.

This all really happened.

⁸ Shamil Basayev (1965-2006), an Islamist guerrilla leader and self-proclaimed terrorist, was vice president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

The room

The next morning we found the Idigov family. There were about 20 to 30 people living in two small rooms.

We found Lechi's mother lying on the ripped mattress with a rag covering her head. I had stayed in her house in Orekhov twice. She hasn't heard any news of her husband or sons for a long time. Hava, Lechi's wife and my closest friend, was crying. When I ask her about her health, she waived her hand at me – no time for it now.

I thought perhaps she was crying also because she was happy we had found them. Her younger daughter, Rita, is also smiling. But Rita's smile was frozen on her face in the First Chechen War. She received a serious psychological trauma. Hava's older daughter, Rosa, is cradling her son. She is pregnant again but there are no hospitals, so she will not receive any medical care.

Lechi's fifteen-year-old son Arsen stood in one pose all the time we were in the house. He is the hope and the pride of the family. He doesn't know the real fate of his father. He has always seen him as strong and brave. Arsen watches his mother cry, his grandmother groan and his sisters wrapped in rugs. Suddenly I felt frightened for him. What will his destiny be? If I were president, I would gather all the Chechen teenagers and give them a good education. My experience on the road of war has taught me that a good book and a good teacher can save these poor children's lives. Oh, well, I am not the president.

What will Arsen's harsh silence turn into after witnessing the humiliation of his parents and siblings? And the silence of hundred of other boys? Maybe our newspaper can help save at least this child.

While writing about Arsen, I recalled an early morning in Shatili. Georgian frontier guards had allowed me to walk behind the border. The refugees usually came out from the mountains with first rays of sun. They would rest near the border, have some snacks. Mothers would change their babies. People would fix their loads and rub their tired feet. Our armed forces bombed the road when the refugees started walking. They shot three passing groups of refugees.

I heard a baby crying and his mother soothing him in a voice I thought was threatening. I asked the woman what she was saying. She glanced at me from head to toe and said sternly: "I promise to tell him everything as soon as he grows up. I shall tell him everything and he will avenge us."

You would have had to be there, you would have had to see it yourself to understand how she said it. She said it as though it was the PROGRAM FOR HER SON'S LIFE! There is no way the war with Chechnya will ever end. But we can still save Arsen.

Airport

We waited ten hours for the plane. I memorized a little boy of 9 or 10. He and his older brother were flying to Belarus. I learned that they were from Samashki. I have many friends from there.

At first he didn't want to talk to me. But then, later, he started bringing me Chechen magazines, one issue after another; there were five of them in all. I went through the pages while he showed me the pictures that were important to him. I guess it was a way for him to talk to me. Maybe it was the most effective way.

All the photographs he pointed to had one theme, destruction: destroyed buildings, children without legs, old women with their guts hanging out. Soon I realized that this boy had his own language made from the suffering of his people. The photos he pointed out led to whole picture phrases, and it became clear that he will never forget anything.

He passed quickly over the pages with Sakharov and Bonner and Bulat Okudzhava.⁹ These words, he didn't know. I made an unsuccessful attempt to reply by showing him other picture-words. He rejected everything that wasn't about the war. His mind was totally focused on the war. Nevertheless, I managed to talk to him. Then he fell asleep on my shoulder. But he didn't sleep for long. He woke when the bombing of Bamut began. Strangely enough, I saw no aggression in the way this boy showed me the suffering of his people.

The Chechens, whether adults or children, have always surprised me with their ability to differentiate between a particular Russian individual and the Russian government in the aggregate, the government that has run over their people for generations. The Chechens desire for contact with Russians is the most unexpected thing of all. Chechens hope that they will be heard and understood, and they are so happy when it happens.

The death of the principal's wife

Can it be true that Serizha Umarova, the school principal's wife in Samashki, is dead? She died with the first bombs. Her older daughters teach Russian language and literature. I have never heard more beautiful Russian language than they spoke. In 1995 Lu-

⁹ Bulat Okudzhava (1924 -1997) – Russian poet and singer.

iza, one of her daughters, said: “Remember, Elvira, this is not a war. These are criminal games with a bad future for both sides. If it were really an operation to drive out military forces, why are the federals guarding the soldier’s wedding? Do you know?”

I didn’t know. But it was from here, from Serizha’s house, that my painful comprehension of the war had its beginnings. The true meaning of this war is still not very clear to me.

The Umarovs went through three wars. They lost relatives and the people closest to them. But every time I came here, they sheltered me and gave me, a Russian, the best of what they had.

“Do you still remember that time...?” the sisters asked me. I remember, as if it were yesterday. That time we went to the Rostov-Baku highway and Serizha patiently and carefully selected the car that would take me home safely. When we had waited there for hours, Serizha said, “Maybe you should stay one more night?”

I saw how her face would change when she spoke to a driver. Serizha felt she was responsible for me. “I will bring you luck, and you will come back to us,” she would say to me.

What luck have I brought you, Serizha? What is the measure of my personal responsibility for what has happened to you? If Serizha has died, if Aslambek Dombayev lives in fear, if Hava is crying without end, if Arsen is froze in silence, has a humanitarian catastrophe taken place or not?

I turn off the TV no matter who blabbers about this issue.

I remember how Koshman¹⁰ passed through the checkpoint. It was November 11. People were swept away like the trash from the road. The tanks made way for a government official to get to his service tenement. The elderly and the refugees with children were thrown to the side of the road like cattle. Our appearance was distorting the scene. I felt so disgusted to be part of some horrible performance that we were unable to stop. And we couldn’t escape it either.

I have one more thought that gnaws at me. It is scary to write about it even in a personal letter, but I will do it now. In October 1996 I was wandering along the streets of Grozny looking for a telephone. The central station was in ruins. I was too late for the bus to Achkhoy-Martan and had to search for a place to spend the night. Instead of a ruined

¹⁰ In 1991 Nikolai Koshman was appointed deputy commander of railroad forces and remained in this position until 1996. Between 1994 and 1995 Koshman supervised restoration of railroad service in Chechnya.

building, there was a huge crater that contained the remains of a building. On one of its panels, I saw a paper that read international calls: Moscow, Washington, Rostov, Baku, Istanbul, and Tel-Aviv!

I started going through the ruins and got to the room. Yes, there was one room among the ruins. Four young Chechens were having something to eat. They invited me to sit with them. Yes, you could call any place on earth from there. When I asked where I could spend the night, the oldest one responded that I could stay at his house. Neither those who accompanied me, nor those who offered me a call for free, nor anybody else, seemed like enemies to me.

We definitely must fight terrorism. But when I hear that Grozny is under another attack, I feel –with fear and pain – for those we could not distinguish from the terrorists and for those with whom we couldn't negotiate and for those we were unable to save. Was killing them the only thing we were capable of?

P.S. Yesterday during a class, I was telling my students about a Chechen forester who became a soldier when his whole family was destroyed by one bomb – his wife and seven boys. One of my students, who was born during Perestroika, said quietly, “Then they deserve it. That’s why they were killed.” A thought went through my head: What a short path there is from Stalin to Chechnya and back again.

POST-SOVIET MILITARY THREATS

Galina Kovalskaya (Moscow) The Roundup



Ezhenedelnyi Zhurnal, (the Weekly Journal), February 4, 2003

Police help hunt and detain draftees – as if they are criminals

BORIS Kulagin was drafted into the army forcibly, straight from his home. The draft differed little from an ordinary arrest. Late one evening, a district policeman and an officer of the Draft Commission came to his Kulagin's home, told him to pack up double quick and took him first to the Draft Commissioner's Office and then directly to the conscription center on Ugreshskaya Street. In his haste, Boris forgot to leave his wallet at home, so his little sister, an orphan, was left without money. Boris is his sister's legal guardian.

According to law, an under-aged child may not be left without a guardian. The child's only legal guardian could not, in principle, be drafted. The Draft Commissioner for Butyrka District, Moscow, however, decided that the girl's second brother could take up the guardianship. The brother had been released conditionally from prison not long ago. No Russian court would have appointed him guardian. Besides, he had stated that he did not care about his sister and wanted nothing to do with her. All that aside, the law says that while a child has only one legal guardian, that guardian cannot be drafted.

The Draft Commissioner is one of the powers-that-be and, therefore, above law. There is no one to take the Draft Commissioner to court: The Child Welfare Board is unlikely to go to the trouble of defending the interests of Boris's sister. Boris himself will not have access to a lawyer for a long time to come. In fact, the chances that a court would uphold the law are small. Where the draft is concerned, the courts often give draft commissioners unqualified support, in defiance of law and common sense.

They rounded up Alvia Djaffarov, a college student, during the spring draft of 2001. At that time, in the race to meet quotas, many college students – despite entitlement to deferment – were taken from the streets and their apartments. But there was something special about Djaffarov's story that made it eligible for it the widest publicity.

If a student doesn't manage to get out of the conscription center, it is practically impossible to gain discharge from the army later. The list of reasons for discharge does not include wrongful enlistment of a college student; lawmakers, apparently, did not envision this possibility.

Djaffarov's parents brought suit. The Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, support the Djaffarovs. But the Ostankino District Court ruled against the parents. The judge declared that because, when being dispatched to the conscription center, Djaffarov did not present the Draft Commissioner with a letter from his college proving his status – he had to serve. This is absurd. He was taken to the conscription center direct from the Draft Commissioner's Office to which he had been brought forcibly from home. He did not even have time to pack properly, much less to run to his college to get the paper. Even that is not the full legal picture. A student is not obliged to carry papers confirming his or her status. According to appendix 3 of Regulations regarding Conscription of Citizens of the Russian Federation into Military Service, the Draft Commissioner is obligated to request form № 26 confirming a student's status. Notwithstanding the regulation, the court upheld the Draft Commissioner's actions, and the appellate Moscow City Court confirmed the lower court's decision.

While court procedures were dragging on, the young man continued his military service. With his university exams nearing, Djaffarov's mother traveled to meet with her son's regiment commander and persuaded him to grant her son leave for his exams. Djaffarov passed his exams and returned to soldiering. Then, Djaffarov's relatives and the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, appealed to the Military Prosecutor's Office at the garrison to intervene. The prosecutor recommended to the military command that it discharge Djaffarov because, notwithstanding the court's decision, he was drafted illegally. The military command followed the prosecutor's recommendation; it discharged Djaffarov. But the story does not end here. After a couple of months had passed, the garrison's new prosecutor reconsidered his predecessor's recommendation. Djaffarov's name was reinstated on the list of military personnel, and draft officials were sent to bring him back to his regiment. At that point, the poor young man's nerves gave in and he landed in a psychiatric clinic. At least the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers insists that Djaffarov is not hiding there from the army, but has really become ill as the result of these misadventures.

During the fall draft of 2002, police and draft officers again ambushed young men in hallways of their apartments. They were again caught unawares – late in the evening or early in the morning – and dragged to conscription centers. They often lied to the young men, telling them they were being taken to the Draft Commissioner's Office for medical examination; then, without a word of explanation, they would be driven from there directly to the conscription center on Ugreshka Street.

When a draftee undergoes regular enlistment procedures, he receives a summons in advance. If entitled to deferment, he has a chance to collect the necessary papers to prove so. He may try to prove that he has been issued the summons in error, or present results of a medical examination if he is ill. Of course, not everyone gets a chance to argue his

case before the Draft Commissioner, but at least there is time to get help from the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers other human rights activists or a lawyer.

These roundups have been designed to deny a draftee precisely the opportunity to defend his rights. This is why most of the roundup targets are young people like Boris Kulagin and Alvian Djaffarov, those who are exempt from draft.

Sasha Vorozheikin received a summons to appear on November 11 and fully intended to serve. However, on November 5, he and his friends got into a fight with some grown-ups and Sasha suffered a knife wound to the back. He was hospitalized and then discharged for a two-month recuperation at home. His relatives took his medical papers to the Lefortovo Draft Commissioner's Office. On the morning of December 17, a district policeman and a military officer came to Vorozheikin's apartment and literally took him from his bed: "Off to the Commissioner's office you go for examination," they told him. Sasha showed them his sick leave certificate and the hospital's medical report. The officer took it and told him that the surgeon at the commissioner's office would consider it. But Sasha was not taken to a surgeon, and no one examined his wound. As he later told his mother, "A woman in a red blazer came out and, without even glancing at the papers, said: 'You are fine now, you can serve.'"

Sasha's mother, Lyudmila, works as a kindergarten teacher. She was about to leave for work when the unwelcome guests arrived. She was, of course, upset with her sick son being dragged off, but it never occurred to her that he could be conscripted with a wound in his back. Returning from work, she was surprised to find Sasha was not at home. She phoned the Draft Commissioner's Office, and a happy voice reported that her son "is already in the army." For the next few days, Lyudmila tried to contact Sasha, to find out where he was. "Every time I received a different answer; they would tell me that he was at such and such place, then that he was at another," Lyudmila's voice trembles recalling these worrisome days. Finally, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers learned that Sasha was in the Tushino district of Moscow, which the Draft Commission was, at first, reluctant to confirm.

All things considered, Lyudmila is fortunate to have her son serve close to home. Another soldier's mother – whose son was also taken "for examination" and did not come home – found him a week later in the Khabarovsk Krai, in the Far East. Russian law does not require draft officials to inform families of a conscript's whereabouts, and they usually do not.

Sasha tries to keep up his spirits. He tells his mother that he is well – except his wound bothers him on cold days. Once, after the soldier's weekly trip to the bathhouse, he came down with high fever, but it passed.

Maxim Platonov was drafted despite suffering from osteoma¹ of the hip. He was summoned to the Draft Commissioner's Office on December 6. He brought with him his medical records listing his condition and stating that he needed an operation. His operation had been already scheduled for later in December. At the Draft Commissioner's Office, the surgeon sent him to the chief physician. The chief physician took the report, turned it in his hands a few times, and said: "Get dressed. We're going to the medical examination board." But instead of the examination board, Maxim was taken to the Ugreshka conscription center. Luckily, he had a mobile phone with him and could ask his parents to bring him soap and a toothbrush. Maxim's leg bothered him from day one. "All the guys run four laps around the parade ground; I cannot make a single one," he complained to his mother. At the end of January, he was hospitalized with pneumonia. There he managed to see a surgeon, who confirmed the osteoma diagnosis and recommended an operation. On January 23 he was operated on at the military hospital. Does our motherland really need soldiers who require urgent medical attention?

Military officers complain to journalists that conscripts are unhealthy, that it is impossible to make soldiers of them, and that serious accidents occur because mentally unstable young people are drafted. Draft commissioners and the heads of local administration are responsible for producing numbers, not quality. Maxim's regiment commander would never ask why he was sent a sick boy. If Maxim's parents were to sue – unlikely, since they would be afraid of repercussions falling on their son – the best they could hope for is that their son would return home (if the judge were different from the one who ruled on the Djaffarov case).

Draft commissioners who draft sick young people are never punished. In June 2000 the Government of the Russian Federation passed a decree which rewards provincial governors for fulfilling draft quotas: the winner in this headhunting competition is awarded a medal, and the two runners-up receive monetary rewards. In other words, governors are motivated to draft as many soldiers as they can and bear no responsibility for illegally drafting those entitled to deferment or exempt from draft.

Unlike Boris Kulagin, Sasha Vorozheikin and Maxim Platonov, Dmitry Krivososov is eligible for the draft. His single mother is disabled, but her disability ranking is three, not two, which would have exempted Dmitry from the draft. It does not matter that Tatiana, his mother, is deaf and mute and that she must care for her paralyzed mother. The police took Dmitry to a conscription center, leaving his helpless mother in complete despair. In case of emergency, Tatiana cannot even call an ambulance for her mother.

Draftee roundups are now a fashion. It is a rare draft campaign that succeeds without them. Usually they begin a month to six weeks before the draft campaign's end. The

¹ A benign tumor composed of bony tissue.

closer it gets to the end, the more ferocious the roundups become. In the mid-1990s, young men were hunted with the help of soldiers from nearby military bases. Later, this practice was determined to be illegal, so now the police are used instead.

The Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers believes that use of police instead of soldiers does not free the roundups from questions of legality. Hunting boys with the help of police and dragging them off to a conscription center is not a lawful procedure. But even if such a practice could be reconciled with the law – the law “On Draft and Military Service” gives authorities broad powers in dealing with draftees and with those subject to draft registration – it clearly has a destructive impact on society. More accurately, this destructive outcome is produced by a draft system that causes these systematic roundups. When those responsible for draft are motivated to produce numbers, and the targeted segment of society views military service as a burden and tries to avoid it as best it can, the former are tempted to hunt and ambush the latter. While the latter use any means, lawful or not, to escape from the former. Only those who believe they are entitled to deferment or exemption from service don't make an effort to hide. It is they who get caught in the roundups. Thus boys who are sick at call up sometimes become invalids while doing military service (though, as we know, even those who were drafted in good health return often as invalids too), while those who depend on their sons or brothers are abandoned, as happened to Kulagin's sister.

Unfortunately, the practice of roundups is not likely to change. The army is catastrophically short of servicemen. The transition to a volunteer army has been postponed again and again. Therefore, the army will continue conscripting its soldiers through roundups.

Sayana Mongush (Kyzyl, Tuva) **Don't Send Your Sons to the Army**



Plus Inform, February 16, 2005

From the last letter by a Russian Army private

THE author is from Kyzyl, the capital of the Republic of Tuva, which is in southern Siberia on the border with Mongolia. The story centers around two soldiers from Tuva who desert the army and hide in the basement of an apartment building. They are killed there by a police SOBR team, the Special Force for Speedy Response. While the circumstances of their death remain unclear, Sayana Mongush, writing in another article, reports that when relatives opened one soldier's coffin, they found he had been shot in the back of the head.

Shoran Shanmak and Artysh Mongush left Tuva on May 20, 2004. The motherland had called them to fulfill their civic duty. They had planned to return home in May 2006 wearing military insignia and carrying colorful scrapbooks, with dashing cocked peak-caps on their heads. But there would be nothing of the kind. On February 14, 2005, two caskets would arrive from Abakan with instructions to the parents that they were not to be opened.

After a successful six-month period at the army training camp in Chita, Junior Sergeant Artysh Mongush, drafted from Bai-Khaaka, and Private Shoran Shanmak, drafted from Ak-Turug, were sent to the artillery unit where they were to serve. Kyakhta, a border town, was their final destination — as it turned out, in more than one sense. Soon the parents of Shoran and Artysh would be sent identical telegrams: “On February 4 your son assaulted an artillery-park duty officer and appropriated his weapon. During attempt to apprehend, resisted police. In response to demand to surrender, he opened fire. Killed in the fire exchange.”

Who will share the mothers' pain? The military prosecutor? The draft commission? Those to whom these mothers entrusted their sons, alive and well?

This tax we pay to the motherland is too heavy: We bring up a son on the subsistence wages it pays us, and then we sacrifice him to her. And not even to her, but to the people who, in the name of the motherland, manipulate us.

A small number of trained people — those who know what the army demands of them and enter it willingly — would be sufficient to defend the motherland. The country can-

not be made, for example, into the cultural center of the world by drafting every woman into ballet or piano classes. To gain results, physical aptness is required, at a minimum. This mythical and venerated motherland gains nothing from wholesale draft of our sons. The gains go to those who need to keep busy with the machinery: the Ministry of Defense and all its vertical appendages. This army, the army of bureaucrats, not the motherland, needs sacrifices. Until society succeeds in enforcing those guarantees that are written in law – alternative service, student deferment, medical release from the draft – and achieves the long-promised voluntary contractual armed service, Russia's mothers will raise their sons not for themselves but for the use and upkeep of the generals. Russia is the only country that preserves this heartless conscription system, which tramples on rights and freedoms of people caught in serfdom to the state.

Our soldiers all too often desert the army. The problem besets even elite and showcase units. So often, in fact, that the word deserter has become a codeword for an order to shoot to kill. No soldier – no problem. The machinery of our country has been built, functions now, will continue to function sadly for the foreseeable future, on this foundation.

What did Artysh and Shoran not succeed in telling us? What was behind the SOS their actions, a misdemeanor or even a crime, signaled? Why did they take up this hopeless endeavor a thousand kilometers from home?

The letters the boys wrote home at the beginning of February are just now reaching their parents. The boys, of course, could not have known that these would be their last letters.

The letters are sent just a day or two before Artysh and Shoran will be shot dead in the basement of an apartment building in the garrison town Kyakhta-3 by the police SOBR team dispatched from Ulan-Ude.¹ Why weren't the parents brought in or contacted by the telephone to resolve the situation while the SOBR team was on its 24-hour train journey from Ulan-Ude to Kyakhta? There is no answer and there never will be. A photograph of the scene after the event shows the bricks of the entryway to the basement shattered by an exploded grenade or heavy rifle fire. It matters little which. It seems hardly possible to recreate the events and to call to account those who, without due process of law, ordered the boys' deaths. Nobody needs the truth, except the parents.

Shoran wrote to his aunt, Nina Burbuzhap, deputy headmaster of a high school in Kyzyl-Dag. Most striking is not the young man's restrained description of beatings, humiliation and hunger. Instead it is his use of proper, now rarely used, form of address to his elders and relatives: *ugbai*, *daai-avai*, *cheenin*, *dunmalarym*. His writing is deferen-

¹ The capital of the Republic of Buryatia; it neighbors Tuva.

tial and cultivated. The obscenities he quotes to illustrate how people are addressed in the army are often misspelled. For Shoran, these are unfamiliar words.

Shoran repeatedly warns his aunt not to send her sons to serve. “I write my parents that everything is all right, because I do not want to distress them. Don’t show this letter to anyone! Don’t send your sons to serve in the army, not for anything! Your nephew, Shoran.”

Shoran’s mother teaches in the elementary school in Ak-Turug. His father operates agricultural machinery. It is a hardworking family that is now raising five children. Shoran was the sixth. He dreamed of enrolling in medical school and wanted to get his army service over with so that it would not interfere with his studies. “I thought the army would be cool,” he wrote, “but it turns out it is a mess.”

Artysh Mongush’s mother is a widow. She was raising three sons alone. She had planned to take her younger boys to visit their older brother in March, when school vacation began. She had no inkling what was happening to her son. Too busy with her job as operating room nurse in the local hospital and the cares of motherhood, she missed the television reports of the soldiers’ shooting that ran for two days. The telegram arrived on February 8.

Fingering her son’s last letter, she says that only now has she come to understand the cautious hints his letters offered. Her son had asked to send a little money instead of the parcels she had been sending him. Apparently, he was being robbed of the goods she had been sending. He wrote that he needed postal envelopes, although she would add a few to every letter she sent him. He wrote that he had changed his mind about signing a contract to stay on in the army.

Artysh had graduated from a culinary arts school and worked, before he was drafted, as a cook in a kindergarten. He was a good cook and used to bake cakes for his grandmother, who lives in Kyzyl. She had planned to accompany him to the conscription center. But he ran there by himself, at six in the morning; that was how much he wanted to serve.

“He was such a tender and handsome boy. But he would not let anybody push him around. If everything was all right with them there, why did they run away carrying arms? Why would a person who wanted so much to be in the army run away? Had he refused to serve and been drafted forcibly, we would have understood. But he wanted to be there so much...”

It looks like the Ministry of Defense has made it a goal to keep the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia busy. Each of its blunders results in the death, maiming or dis-

appearance of soldiers. The committee keeps thick file folders stuffed with documents and correspondence. These are used to help a mother find, if not justice, at least the remains of her son, so that she may bury them properly.

Five years ago, Olesya Oyun lost her son to the army. Allegedly, he went out to relieve himself; he has been missing ever since. Her fruitless search for her son eventually put her in charge of the regional Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. She knows every trick officials use to get by with just a formal reply; she can predict how official bodies will react. She has seen it all a thousand times, as if in a recurring nightmare. She speaks professionally – protecting children from the motherland has become a profession – with the Military Prosecutor's Office, with commanders of military bases and with investigators. This tiny, undaunted woman has made many officials observe the law and do what the state commissioned them to do.

“Soldiers return home as invalids, but they are not paid insurance. Parents must pay to have the bodies of their sons returned to them, compensation for those killed is not paid.” says Olesya Oyun and shows files of cases in which the rights of soldiers and their parents have been defended successfully.

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers monitors military units. Their research shows that the units garrisoned in Borzya and Kyakhta and in Krasnoyarsk Krai's Zheleznogorsk as the worst to serve in. It is against these garrisons that the largest number of complaints from servicemen and parents are lodged.

“Non-regulation personnel interactions,”² exacerbated by ethnic prejudice, make conditions there unbearable. Zheleznogorsk became notorious after an attempt to drown draftees from Tuva, accompanied by cries of “Let's drown the slit-eyes in the Yenisei.”³ Through the efforts of local branches of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (committees are active in almost every Russian region), a military unit has been formed in Krasnoyarsk Krai. The committee branches advocate for the transfer of soldiers drafted from Tuva who have been subjected to abuse to the new unit. “They serve there successfully and return home without having gone through major incidents,” says Olesya Oyun.

Six soldiers on the committee's list of draftees from Tuva have disappeared. One of them, Sholban Oyun, served at military unit № 90709 Vedyaevo in Murmansk Oblast.⁴ He disappeared on December 30, 2002. A charred body was found but never identified. Oyun's parents do not have the money to exhume the body and identify the remains.

² Common shorthand for abuses committed by officers, NCOs or second-year privates. Abuses include beating, humiliation and coercion to perform various services.

³ One of the world's longest rivers; it flows from Mongolia to the Arctic Ocean.

⁴ Vedyaevo is Russia's strategic submarine fleet base on the North Sea.

Each of the missing Tuva lads has been categorized a deserter. For the army, this is a convenient charge. There is no need to expend money and time investigating their disappearance.

The committees keep another list; this one of soldiers whose deaths have been proved to be homicides. Eker Suge-Maadyr died in Irkutsk, where he served in military unit № 93855. At first the death was attributed to jaundice and confirmed by a pathology report. A new examination, however, proved that that the death resulted from beating.

Eker Ottug-ool was killed on July 6, 2003, by three officers who cuffed him to a radiator and beat him. The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation convicted the officers and sentenced each to a year of suspended prison term.

Ai-Kherel Sarplar was killed on his birthday, September 21, 2003, in Kursk Oblast at military unit № 23243 by a drunk second-year soldier.

Only the most recent case has a happy ending. It is the disappearance of a Kyzyl draftee sold into slavery by his commander. He somehow managed to call his mother and tell her that he was no longer serving in the army, but working at a job instead. Through the efforts of the Kyzyl, Moscow and Grozny committees of Soldiers' Mothers, the boy was returned home to Tuva. These are our realities: a soldier has market value, he can be sold, traded, given as a security or killed if he causes troubles. And there is always a way out: to declare him either a deserter or missing.

As politicians see it, our sacred duty as mothers is to supply, without interruptions, raw material for the state. Nobody gives a thought to the notion that parents may have plans for their children that differ from those of the General Staff. They may count on support from their children in their later years or hope to bounce grandchildren on their knees. But, first, they receive summons from the Draft Commission and then a state-issued casket with a body for which the state has no further use.

On Friday February 18 at 1 p.m. the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia will hold a charitable marathon event at the Moscow Theater of Music and Drama. Proceeds will be used to create a fund to aid mother's of soldiers and servicemen in distress.

Alexander Golts (Moscow) The Autumn Draft



Ezhenedelnyi Zhurnal (the Weekly Journal), October 27, 2004

The problem is not the enormity of defense spending; it is wasteful spending

THE current defense budget is 529 billions rubles, equal to \$18 billion. Igor Rodionov and Igor Sergeev, former ministers of defense, would have been overjoyed to have such sums at their disposal. In the 1990s the Russian military budget never exceeded five billion dollars. In 2005 the country's military budget will be five times larger than in 1999. Nonetheless, the current military chief, Sergei Ivanov, expressed disappointment with the size of his budget at a recent cabinet meeting. Ivanov remarked that the military budget, though increased by a third over the previous year and now making up a third of budgetary spending,¹ could "only minimally" satisfy the needs of the armed forces – provided that natural monopoly tariffs (electrical power, rail transportation and other) remained at the current level. This certainly will not be the case considering the economy's present explosive growth.

That is not all. General Alexander Burutin, assistant to the president for military technology policy, has said that our military must be allocated 3.5% of the country's GNP. This is how much his office thinks the state is obligated by law to spend on defense, not the 2.7% that it is budgeted to spend. General Burutin fails to take into account that in 1997 when Yeltsin decreed this notorious 3.5%, the total state budget was several times smaller than the present one.

It looks like the Ministry of Defense considers its unceasing complaints about lack of funds to have magically effect. What if the president forgot momentarily that Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov is his best friend? What if he asked Ivanov why continually growing defense spending has not led to some minimal improvements in conditions within the armed forces? The best defense is a good offense. The Ministry of Defense is always ready to blame everything on a lack of financing.

The persistent gap between the military's needs and the country's ability to satisfy them has several causes. There is an objective factor: Russian and American armed forces (America's is the mightiest in the world), are comparable in size and comparably equipped. To maintain parity between the two, Russia can cut the costs of upkeep for

¹ According to official figures, the defense budget stood at 17.4% of total budget expenditures in 2005.

military personnel, but cutting military hardware (tanks, planes, strategic missiles) is more problematic. When a country begins shortchanging its hardware, planes begin falling from the skies and missile launches fail, just as we saw during North fleet training exercises this winter. The Ministry of Defense believes that the armed forces have reached the optimal size, a position it has stated repeatedly. Unless its position changes, our armed forces will never have sufficient funds to guarantee normal operations.

The Kremlin would have to demonstrate considerable political will to overcome this problem. But the military has other tricks up their sleeves to make it look like the country is failing to meet its obligations to the armed forces. One concerns defense procurements. This item received the largest increase in the 2005 budget, over 40%. Virtually nothing is known, however, about how this money will be spent. According to General Burutin, the priorities are “nuclear deterrent and general purpose forces.” In other words, priorities haven’t been defined; most likely, this not insignificant sum will be dispersed among the remnants of the Soviet military – the military-industrial complex. As before, the armed forces will receive just a few items of equipment, as many as 14 (!) tanks, for example.

It appears that tanks in Russia, like the Rolls-Royce in Britain, are individually assembled. This despite the well-known fact that large-scale production would have reduced cost per unit several-fold. But what is this to the Ministry of Defense. The ministry says it intends to preserve the manufacturing base for the entire spectrum of armaments, from handguns to missile systems. This leads to unreasonable fragmentation of resources. But the approach has a certain logic behind it: the military brass has placed its bets on a large, draft-based army. To arm it, the whole military industry must be kept alive. The same purpose underlies preservation of mobilization capacities in civilian industries. Three and a half billion rubles are appropriated to this end in the 2005 budget). Everyone knows that maintaining mobilization capacities puts management in shackles; it costs much more than is covered by the defense budget. At the same time, it is a lifesaver for ineffective managers, since enterprises with mobilization capacities are protected from bankruptcy.

There is one redeeming feature in the 2005 budget. It has revealed to us the cost of our “cost-free” military draft: the budget provides over seven billion rubles to register and call-up draftees. Another two billion rubles will be devoted to mobilization preparedness and reservist training. While over 16 billion rubles will be spent to transfer several military units and formations to contract-based service, considerable sums are allocated to a large, Soviet-style army staffed by draftees. Such armed forces can function effectively only when they receive the bulk of the country’s resources. Even today, while the country enjoys the benefits of high oil prices, the level of support Russia can provide to its unreformed army leaves the army in a pitiful state.

Practically the same can be said for Russia's other "power" agencies: the Federal Security Service and the Ministry of Interior.² Their funding increases, but the money they receive is not for investment to promote their development. Therefore, the 2005 budget can be called a militaristic budget not just because it proposes to spend a lot of money on the armed forces and other state power agencies. It is a militaristic budget, first and foremost, because it channels funds to prop up a militaristic state system, a system that has long since outlived its time and that cannot meet today's challenges.

² The equivalent of a ministry of police. These three ministries, the Ministry of Defense, the Federal Security Service and the Ministry of Interior, are usually referred to in Russia as power ministries.

Igor Kravchuk (Petropavlovsk–Kamchatsky) **The Fewer Ships, the More Admirals**



Express-Kamchatka, February 10, 2005

Navy's supreme commander predicts reduction of the fleet

LAST Saturday, February 5, the high command of Russian fleets held its annual operational and mobilization training session in St. Petersburg. The Navy's Supreme Commander, Admiral Vladimir Kuroedov, presided over the event.

Everything would have been smooth, appropriately self-congratulatory even, but for a remark Kuroedov let slip at the ceremony. The admiral said that the Russian Navy will face massive, irreplaceable retirement of ships built in the 1970s sometime after 2010. By 2020, Kuroedov said, Russia's battle fleet will comprise less than 50 ships, an insufficient number to guarantee national security even within coastal waters.

Kuroedov remarks stopped shy of saying that our naval forces – whether the North fleet or forces based on the Kamchatka Peninsula or elsewhere – long ago became a modern version of Peter's the Great "fun fleet," incapable of performing serious tasks. To have said that, would have been to suggest that the crowd of stars-and-stripes admirals ought to resign. But some facts are inescapable: given today's state of ship disrepair, the volume of repairs required and the rate of ship replacement, the navy will not be able to preserve its current surface fleet intact beyond 2015.

Russia will lose, for example, all its submarine mother ships, which will limit its ability to deploy submarines in battle. Russia will no longer possess landing ships, reconnaissance ships, or survey vessels. In the days of the Warsaw Pact, these special-purpose vessels were built largely in East Germany and Poland. The country will not be entirely bereft of ships – it will still own six to eight strategic nuclear submarines and eight to ten multipurpose nuclear submarines.

On the positive side, Vladimir Kuroedov told those gathered, Russia will launch its first corvette in 2005. The shipyard in Severodvinsk continues building nuclear submarines under a program designated as projects 955 and 855. The Yantar shipyard in Kaliningrad is building a training ship and a landing ship. The North Warf shipyard in St. Petersburg is building a reconnaissance ship and is planning to begin construction of the first country's long-range frigate. As promising as this news is, however, this rate of production will never permit the country to rebuild its fleet.

Defender of the Fatherland Day, February 23, is approaching. The military will declaim at length that, despite all the difficulties and in the face of adversity ... the Pacific fleet, at current numerical strength and state of readiness, represents an adequate naval force. And years hence, when we are left not with 50 but with a dozen ships, the naval brass will make the same speeches.

Flexing flabby muscles

Russia's national and local media portray each discovery of an American submarine in Kamchatka waters as an ominous military operation; each goodwill voyage of the Pacific fleet to nearby Japan or Korea is presented to the public as an unprecedented achievement, a demonstration of Russia's military might.

Admiral Kuroedov visited the Pacific fleet in mid-December 2004. He set a new charge before the fleet for July-August 2005: to take up joint exercises of four fleets fleet in the Indian Ocean. Two fleets, the Pacific and the Black Sea fleets, are to represent Russia; the other two will represent the naval forces of India and China. The exercises will include mock battles. India and China are modernizing their fleets. They are doing so, incidentally, with help provided by Russian shipyards. Russia cannot be said to have taken up modernization.

Does Russia need this long voyage? It will be like flexing flabby muscles.

On February 16, 2000, a small, gray-colored ship left the port of Sevastopol. The vessel, the reconnaissance ship *Kildin*, belongs to the Black Sea fleet. Its mission was to spy on the mighty naval forces of the United States and NATO ships assembled in waters offshore of Iraq, where the Americans had detained a Russian tanker claiming it had violated an embargo on export of Iraqi oil. The *Kildin* resembles a fishing boat and looks like a comical challenge to the American carriers. It's fate was worsened by leaks to the press from the General Staff's Chief Intelligence Directorate, which tried to suggest that beneath the *Kildin's* corroded-bathtub exterior, specialists had hidden state-of-the-art electronical, optical, hydro-acoustical and radiation recognizance and a modern computing center.

The *Kildin's* sailors later complained about the stress of floating side by side with the American fleet, with American sailors jokingly aiming artillery pieces at them and jeering via radio at their impotence. But the naval brass was showered with decorations and promotions, as if they have taken back Tsushima from the Japanese.

The 2005 budgets of the Ministry of Defense and other "power ministries" have been increased by a third over the previous year, while the budget of the Ministry of Culture

was cut and allocations to education and health grew only slightly. The military's relative advantage notwithstanding, it continues to drone on that it doesn't have enough, that maintenance of ships that have outlived their service life requires enormous expenditures. In 2005 the Pacific fleet will retire the submarine *Varshavyanka* and two surface ships. It will overhaul several vessels nominally termed battle ships, capable of offering only some banana republics a military threat.

Do we need to continue spending enormous amounts of money to keep this junk afloat? Is there a single politician willing to tell the truth about the real conditions of the Russian fleet and the army? Granted, this would send many admirals and generals and redundant officers into retirement. Would it not be wiser to follow Japan's example and rechristen the fleet a self-defense force than to disgrace ourselves in the Indian Ocean in full view of the British and American armada? No, we will never hear such admissions from our silver-headed Vice-Admiral Voronin or from Kuroedov or from Putin or from anybody else. They will all continue to harp endlessly on Russia's ability to launch rockets and repel the enemy, when all we are really capable of is a nuclear strike.

People's memories are short. Few recall that Vladimir Putin promised to reform Russia's armed forces after the *Kursk* submarine catastrophe. The Western press wrote in 2000: "In promising to reform the armed forces, President Vladimir Putin has taken on one of his country's most difficult problems. The reform is likely to decide the future of Russia's nuclear arsenal." In the same year, it was reported that Russian forces in Chechnya were poorly equipped, that military equipment breaks down too often, and that troops often do not go through battle training. Putin's hard-line stand on Chechnya has become his trademark, but this costly military campaign has dragged on for too long, exposing weaknesses of the armed forces and exacerbating budgetary problems. According to Minister of Defense Igor Sergeev, the war has depleted army stocks by 85%, and there is no money to replenish them. Because of military budget cuts, the percentage allocated to the navy has also decreased – from 15% five years ago to the current 11% to 12%. Investment in shipbuilding, armaments, battle training and technical servicing has decreased sharply. The fleet struggles just to pay sailors' salaries. Instead of plowing the seas, the majority of Russia's ships are rusting at port, slowly turning into scrap metal.

The report of the General Staff of the Russian Navy, published in 1999, disclosed that in ten years Russia's fleet had been reduced by one thousand ships. Unless financing is increased, Supreme Navy Commander Vladimir Kuroedov warned in 2000, the number of ships will decline to 60 by 2016. Nuclear submarines are the navy's chief priority, but in the last 10 years their numbers have shrunk by two-thirds. The number of nuclear submarines carrying strategic missiles has decreased proportionally: from 62 in 1990 to 18 in 2000. The surface fleet is in even worse shape. Few ships are in combat-ready condition. Over the last few years, the pride of the fleet, the carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*,

has been out to sea so rarely that its crew lacks substantial experience with sea-based aircraft operations.

On Russia's Navy Day, July 30, 2000, Putin said, "The Navy always has been and remains a symbol of a strong Russia and a mainstay of its military might." Putin and the navy command had planned to send the *Admiral Kuznetsov* to the Mediterranean, after reconstructing Russian naval facilities in Syria. They also had planned to modernize the Russian naval base in Vietnam. Notwithstanding grand words, for Russians, the Russian fleet often brings to mind recollections of disasters rather than remembrances of glory.

In 1998 Defense Minister Igor Rodionov visited Kamchatka. When Rodionov was still in charge of strategic missiles forces, he used to receive birthday presents from Kamchatka. There was a testing grounds on Kamchatka, at Kluchi, and from it a military transport plane would fly to Moscow every year carrying caviar, smoked salmon and other presents for the general and his staff. During this 1998 visit, the minister met with Kamchatka Governor Vladimir Biryukov. On the spot, they hatched a plan to make Kamchatka an international resort. "What do we need the Canary Islands for when we have Lake Baikal and Kamchatka?" the minister said, perusing an album of Kamchatka scenery presented to him by Governor Biryukov. "There is nothing to do on the Canary Islands, there is nothing but sand," seconded Felix Gromov, then Navy Supreme Commander. "We have no use for sand, we will vacation on Kamchatka," said the minister and promised to re-activate two military airports to receive international passenger flights and to help with repairing a landing strip at Elizovo Airport. Minister Rodionov also promised that the Vilyuchinsk ship repair facilities, plant № 49, specializing in nuclear submarines repair, would henceforth receive repair orders from the whole Pacific fleet.

Where are these ministers and supreme commanders with their promises? That is how it always is in Russia. New ministers, supreme commanders and presidents blame the old ones for everything. The president has yet to explain to the Russian public the goals of our internal and external policies, what we want to achieve with our defense programs and much more.

A year before the Rodionov visit, his predecessor, Pavel Grachev (nickname Pasha-Mercedes), visited Kamchatka. Drinking parties, empty promises and the disbursement of medals, ranks and promotions marked his voyage. On the last leg of his voyage, Grachev visited Chukotka. There his plane took on two dozens polar bear skins and several bags of walrus tusks, presents for his numerous, fat-faced entourage. This is where the real achievements of the stars-and-stripes crowd lie.

Materials for this article was drawn from Internet sources, the *Daily News*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Jane's Defense Weekly* and the author's personal archives.

Igor Kravchuk (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky) The Worse It Gets, the More Secret It Becomes



Express-Kamchatka, November 25, 2004

IF Dmitry Koval had been an orphan, the country would have never learned of the accident aboard the K-233 nuclear sub *Podolsk*. The accident, which occurred off the Kamchatka Peninsula, took Koval's life. Dmitry's parents buried him in their home city of Krasnoyarsk and informed the press, which then spread news of the accident across the world. Russia's military prefers to keep these things secret. Its strategy has always been the worse it gets, the more secret it becomes.

Keeping accidents under wraps is a military tradition that stems from a gross misunderstanding of military duty. When Admiral Doronin was still in command of the fleet, his subordinates concealed even more scandalous events.

People are apprehensive about things that go awry on nuclear submarines. That is understandable — they are nuclear, and they carry nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons.

What happened on the *Podolsk* was a technical accident: a high-pressure water tank blew up. The peaceful population was never threatened. The military reported, perhaps for the benefit of a potential enemy, that the submarine remains combat ready. This is not the first fatal accident of this year on a Kamchatka nuclear submarine fleet. Several months ago, a sailor died aboard the nuclear submarine *Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky*. He was killed by an electrical shock. That accident stemmed from a violation of safety regulations.

Podolsk-class vessels are second-generation strategic nuclear submarines. According to data from U.S. intelligence agencies, there are twelve ships of this class in the Russian fleet. The *Podolsk* (factory number 395) was built in 1979 in Severodvinsk. The vessel performed two missile launches in 1990 in the Sea of Okhotsk, hitting ground targets on the Kanin Nos testing grounds.

The military continues to shroud in secrecy another accident that occurred not so very long ago. On the eve of 2003, nuclear submarine *Samara* returned from patrol to its home port with a hole in its outer hull. The hole was large, measuring several square meters, and it was located in the bow area, near the hydro-acoustical station compartment. The military has maintained strict silence about the occurrence. I tried to find out what had happened but was told that this is a state secret, or military representatives simply hung up in response to my questions.

Reaction to the article I published recently about the large-scale theft of electronic parts on submarines and military installations was just as telling. The heart of the matter was that sailors had been removing electronic components containing precious metals and selling them, in the process ruining expensive equipment. In response to my article, the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal investigation into the publication of the article. It based this action on conclusions of an expert commission of the General Staff. And it alleged that I had divulged military secrets. Loafers from military counter-intelligence came all the way from Vladivostok to question me. They failed to strike up a conversation.

Had Dmitry Koval survived his injuries, his parent would have had nothing to tell the press, and the accident would have remained secret.

Igor Kravchuk (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky) Glory to the Sailors! Shame on the Navy?



Express-Kamchatka, August 11, 2005

FEW believed that the crew of mini-submarine *AC-28* would be saved. The 13-meter cockle-shell would surely be brought to the surface as a titanium coffin bearing seven dead sailors. As it turned out, death had only taunted the boys with his scythe through the portholes at a depth of 200 meters. The sailors had already said their goodbyes. They had written letters to their wives – they would give to them to their wives later to keep as the mementos – when the small British submarine *Scorpio*, a remotely operated vehicle, used its powerful cutters to sever the bonds holding the bathyscaphe. The American super scorpions were about to arrive, but they were no longer needed.

Surely the crew of the bathyscaphe, the six sailors and the 59-year-old engineer, will drink each year to the glory of Britain, Her Majesty’s Fleet and the American Navy. But not to the Russian Navy. Our navy, once again, gets a thorn-wreath of shame. In the list of excuses: did not have enough time, could not do it, did not have the rescue equipment, wanted to avoid publicity...

It seems the *Kursk* tragedy has taught our navy little. We called on Norwegian divers to open the submarine’s hatches. For some reason, we did not have divers of our own available, although we used to be “ahead of the planet” in diving R&D. Now, again, we were forced to make an emergency call to the world: “Brothers, help with whatever you can: our bathyscaphe is drowning.” It was shameful, but honest. We should be thankful to our silver-headed admirals, who have not been accustomed either to honesty or to asking for help from abroad, for the plea at least. We used to sacrifice tens and hundreds of lives of soldiers and sailors in fear of disclosing our secrets. Still, this call for help is an acknowledgement of our fleet’s weaknesses. We acknowledge that, although our strategic subs could destroy half of the world, we are unable to save a tiny, submersible cockle-boat that has sunk at in shallow waters.

Clubs instead of ships

In the previous issue, we reported on Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov’s trip to Kamchatka on the eve of the Day of the Russian Navy. Ivanov visited Rybachy as well – for the official opening of a new officers’ club (the Officers’ Palace), a building where a lot of money have been sunk. Now we see that what is needed are not new recreational

facilities, but adequate wages, new ships, rescue equipment and vessels like the British *Scorpio*. As we have written, not a single new combat vessel has arrived to bolster the Kamchatka fleet in the last 15 years, except for two or three nuclear submarines constructed in Soviet times. I would add that not a single bomber or fighter plane has arrived. Everything is aging, becoming corroded, being written off and plundered. It is sad to watch this degradation knowing that the military budget of our mighty neighbor China exceeds ours by \$15 billion. But our leaders have a more important thing than defense on their minds. Nothing matters as long as oil prices remain high.

Running rescue operations with a checklist

I don't understand what qualified Defense Minister Ivanov, a former lieutenant-general in the KGB, to assume operational control over a marine rescue operation. Perhaps he took charge of the operation to save his own skin and not out of concern for the lives of the sailors. Many consider him a likely successor to Putin, but if what had been brought to the surface proved to be a coffin with seven corpses inside, he would be out of this job and the line of succession.

The minister was able to breathe more easily when the hatch was opened from inside and live sailors tumbled out into the light of day. In his jubilation, Ivanov proclaimed the sailors from the *AC-28* heroes and promised they would receive awards. Before the cameras, he put on an army field cap with a non-regulation cockade made of a marine badge. In truth, I don't get what was so heroic in the crew's behavior. They became entangled in cables, failed to get out on their own, blew up a secret mission and damaged an expensive antenna device. In Stalin's times, they would have been interrogated at Lubyanka, not awarded prizes for heroism. Some say they demonstrated perseverance and courage. But how would any of us have behaved if sealed in a capsule with minimal reserves of food, water and air? We would have sat as quietly as mice, without much thrashing around. This is exactly what the crew did. The press reported that they had food and water to last them for five days. It turned out there was just enough for each to have a cracker and a few mouthfuls of water a day. The state awards will be their consolation for the ordeal and a sign of forgiveness.

Anonymous call

As usual, in the beginning information on the bathyscaphe's distress was contradictory. Some said the bathyscaphe had become ensnared in a fishing net, which did not ring true; then there were reports about some antenna. It was said that the bathyscaphe had been pulled 100 meters closer to the surface, or 60 meters according to a later report, but nobody revealed how far the vessel was from shore. The accident became news thanks to an anonymous call to the press by a woman who identified herself as

the wife of a submariner. We should thank this courageous woman. As usual, at first the military denied everything. When it acknowledged the emergency, it became a major news item worldwide. The navy, as usual, wanted to keep it under wraps, hoping to resolve the situation quietly on its own. There would have been an open scandal later had the sailors died.

Secret Installations

It appears that the mission of the *AC-28* (an underwater rescue vehicle, project 1855) was to blow out ballast tanks of an underwater surveillance antenna device. Those installations are said to be located seaward off Schipunsky Cape from Anglichanka¹ and beyond the Beryozovaya Bay.

A hydro-acoustic antenna, the national press explained, is a lattice holding hydrophones and measuring 70 meters by 20 meters and two meters high. The thing is mounted on ballast tanks and, like submarines, submerges when its tanks are filled with water. It is held in place by anchors. The antenna comes to the surface when its tanks are blown out with air. The *AC-28*, reportedly, was to bring to the surface the blow out tube intake. It is possible that strong underwater current caused the *AC-28* to become entangled in the tubes and cables of the hydro-acoustic antenna.

Where were those divers?

Why weren't divers brought in to take part in the rescue? The Russian press reported that the country doesn't have that kind of diver. That is not true. In Lomonosov in Leningrad Oblast, there is a deep-sea divers' base that Alexander Zvyagintsev heads. Zvyagintsev is a holder of a Hero of Russia decoration. During the first 24 hours of the emergency, however, no one from the Naval General Staff contacted Zvyagintsev's base, because, they say, the Pacific fleet has its own divers.

Then, one may ask, why weren't the Pacific fleet divers used? The military says they *were* engaged in the rescue operation but had not been able to accomplish anything. I am not an expert on diving, but reading open sources it is possible to learn that before divers can begin working at these depths, they have to spend several days in pressure chambers to adjust to the pressure. There was no time for that.

Not long ago, I came upon an article in *Popular Mechanics* (No.1, January 2005) about an atmospheric pressure diving suit (called Newtsuits) that had been invented. There is normal pressure inside the suit and the diver breathes normal air. Essentially, it is a mini-submarine, so there is no need for compression and decompression. And this is

¹ A garrison town near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

what the article said on page 56, "After the *Kursk* tragedy, the Directorate for Search and Rescue Operations of the Russian Navy purchased eight atmospheric pressure diving suits, Newtsuits HS1200, suitable for depths of up to 365 meters from OceanWorks International Inc."

So, where are those suits? The press reported that the Pacific fleet has one of them on the rescue vessel *Sayany*. The suit and the auxiliary equipment that include a winch could not simply be put on a plane and delivered to the accident scene. At the time of *AC-28*'s scheduled maintenance operation, the *Sayany* was too far away. The vessel was dispatched to the scene, but at maximum speed of five knots to eight knots, it would have arrived no earlier than August 9. Why do we need a slow coach for a rescue vessel?

I think the Military Prosecutor's Office, the KGB and Deputy Zavarzin should try to find out where those eight, \$2-million suits are and what condition they are in. Just to make sure that no one has rented them out to oil companies for sea-shelf drilling.

Secret antenna

Not for nothing did the *AC-28* find itself in Berezovaya Bay. It was supposed to work on an underwater surveillance antenna. The Americans have littered ocean and sea floors with hydrophones and drawn them into a single network. The Soviet Union lacked the resources to do the same. All we could afford were stationary hydro-acoustic surveillance systems with which to monitor our coastal waters.

Some say that there are other, very secret, antennae on Kamchatka. They detect submarines not acoustically, but with help of radio waves, just as radar identifies above-surface targets. It is possible that the *AC-28* was servicing just such an antenna.

Military forces in the northeast have a unit, 51401, called the 71st surveillance area. It comprises several hydro-acoustic stations situated along the Kamchatka coast. The military listens at considerable sea depths to detect enemy submarines. Data from the acoustic stations is relayed to the fleet's battle information post.

One of these posts is located at Anglichanka. In the late 1990s it was upgraded with an experimental nuclear submarines detection system, the Dnestr-B. It was to be tested at Anglichanka before the navy entered it into service. The system included a gigantic antenna, 120 meters long and 15 meters high. As far as we know, it carried hydrophones, but it mainly functioned as underwater radar. The antenna, which carried tanks along its sides, was towed twelve miles from the shore and sunk at a depth of 200 meters. The tanks on one side were ballast tanks; they would sink the antenna when filled with

water. After sinking, the antenna was anchored. The Dnestr-B surveillance system had showed good results. It had a radar range of 200 miles and several kilometers in depth. The system was able to detect small targets. But in 1997 it went blind. Divers sent to investigate did not find the antenna where it was supposed to be anchored. Most likely, it had become caught in a dragnet or an anchor and set adrift.

An unidentified object is towed to Kamachatka

News agencies from throughout the world reported the discovery of an unidentified object near the Japan's shores in 2000. The object turned out to be our antenna. Our military towed it back to Kamchatka and installed it in a dock at the Vilyuchinsk ship repair facility. The repairs were reportedly completed last year and the antenna was put in place for further testing and tuning. Possibly this was the antenna the AC-28 was working with. There are many cables, pipes and ropes coming in and out of the antenna. It would be little wonder if the bathyscaphe became entangled in them.

Who divulged military secrets

Insofar as the Dnestr-B system is concerned, it is difficult not to mention its plundering, with the tacit consent of the officers and under the watchful eye of military counter-intelligence. While our antenna drifted for three years toward Japanese shores and the ground part of the system did not function, sailors from military unit 27,120 were busy removing its valuable electronic parts, the capacitors. If you have ever taken a capacitor apart, you know that it houses a roll of aluminum foil. But unlike the capacitors used in consumer electronics, the foil in military-grade capacitors is not just made of aluminum; it contains silver, platinum, palladium and other rare elements. Throughout the armed forces, billions of rubles worth of military equipment has been plundered and ruined to get to the wealth of these capacitors.

Alexsei Abramov, a stocker serving in military unit 27,120, and his comrade Andrei Devyatov stole electronic boards from instrumentation racks for several month. They would take the boards to the boiler room, cut out the capacitors and burn the rest in the furnace. Altogether, they stole more than a hundred boards. The sailors sold KM series capacitors containing precious and rare metals for 1200 rubles to "individuals whom the investigation failed to identify," but who, in fact, had been regularly touring military bases and buying stolen electronic parts.

In 2001 a military tribunal sentenced Abramov and Devyatov to seven and five years of imprisonment, respectively, for plundered the secret Dnestr-B system. After I reported on the case, an expert commission of the General Staff decided that I had divulged top-secret information. The Chief Military Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal in-

vestigation. The investigation was assigned to the Military Department of the FSB² of the Pacific fleet. Investigator came from Vladivostok to Kamchatka to question me as a suspect. But there was not much they could do: I could not be considered a carrier of state secrets, since I hadn't been cleared to access them, and, therefore, could not have divulged them.³ They relieved themselves of my case by passing it on to the "coffin house"⁴ on Sovetskaya Street, the FSB's Regional Directorate, where it was promptly closed.

If the *AC-28* was, indeed, working with the Dnester-B antenna, one could postulate that the surveillance system had been cursed. It was badly damaged again when the British *Scorpio* cut through all those antenna cable and pipes to save the crew. Perhaps it sustained even greater damage in the first two days of the accident, when the military used a dragnet to free the bathyscaphe.

Mercury-filled bathyscaphes

When the bathyscaphe got into distress, a 59-year-old engineer, Gennady Bolonin, was onboard. Bolonin represented Lazurit the company that had developed the *AC-28*. Lazurit developed the titanium hull bathyscaphes, officially called underwater rescue vehicles, to help submarine rescue crews in depths of up to 500 meters. Project 1855 Priz rescue vehicles have the following characteristics:

displacement – 55 m³

speed: maximum horizontal – 3.3 knots; cruising – 2.3 knots; vertical – 0.5 knots;

log speed – 0.6 knots

range – 21 miles at cruising speed

diving depth – 1,000 m

dimensions – 13.5 × 3.8 × 4.1 m

submerged operation time – 120 hours; with rescued sailors onboard – 10 hours
crew of three; can accommodate up to 20 rescued sailors

The *AC-28* was built in 1989. It is one of nine vessels of this type that were built. All of them are based on surface rescue ships, which make them difficult to launch in rough seas. Two of the rescue vehicles are housed in the hold of the *Georgy Kuzmin*, which is, or was, based at Kamchatka. A series of accidents has marred the record of these mini-sub.

² The Federal Security Service is the heir to the KGB.

³ Lack of clearance to sensitive information was not a factor in prosecution Russian military expert Igor Sutyagin, who was convicted, in 2004 to 15 years imprisonment for divulging state secrets. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have expressed concern over Sutyagin's conviction.

⁴ So called because of the rectangular shields featured prominently on FSB's emblems, which grace the facade of the building on Sovetskaya Street in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

Few know that mercury was used in one of the vessels to fill the ballast tanks. As the main purpose of these vehicles is to rescue submarine crews, the mini-sub must be able to attach itself to a sunken submarine and evacuate its crew members. To do so, the rescue vehicle must be tilted to align it with the submarine and its escape hatches. Tilting of the rescue vehicle was to be achieved more expeditiously by pumping mercury to and from different ballast tanks. To allow the vehicle to resurface after the mission's completion, the mercury was to be dumped into the ocean. Unfortunately, the mercury was found to seep through the hull, creating dangerous concentrations of mercury vapor in the air inside the vessel. In the early 1990s, water was substituted for mercury.

In 1992 the *Georgy Kuzmin* was taken to Vladivostok. The mercury was drained and the ballast tanks were enlarged to allow water to be used. Someone from the crew contacted the coastal mafia and offered to sell the mercury. The deal apparently went sour, and Warrant Officer Steshenko got his head cut off by the bandits. The military has written this off as an accident: allegedly, he was drunk and fell beneath a streetcar. Nobody investigated the source of the sudden wealth he had been spending in bars.

The mercury remained in small cast iron tanks in sealed wooden boxes onboard the *Georgy Kuzmin*. In 1994, during an inspection onboard the vessel, officials found that more than 600 kilograms of mercury was missing. The thieves were caught and convicted. They had managed to smuggle part of the mercury ashore and had hidden it in an apartment in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. They hid the rest under the deck. The military claims there is no mercury onboard the *Georgiy Kuzmin* and that the mini-submarines use only water as the ballast. However, kilograms of mercury are found periodically in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

In the 1980s the Soviet navy obtained two unique ocean-going rescue ships, the *Elbrus* and the *Alagez*. They were built under project 537. Each carried four different mini-submarines, an MTK-200 underwater robot vessel and diving equipment for work at depths of up to 250 meters. The *Alagez*, with four mini-subsonboards, came to Kamchatka last year. We don't know whether the diving equipment is still there.

We would be grateful if our readers could update us on the situation with the diving equipment. We don't expect the military to enlighten us. They keep everything secret and report that everything is in tip-top shape.

Alexei Klochikhin, Olga Todoshchenko (Perm) The Missiles Are Returning



Permskye Novosti (Perm News), February 7, 2003

Is Perm to Become a Dumping Ground for Arms?

The Americans are back in Perm after five years of wandering Russia's wide-open spaces in search of a suitable setting in which to establish a plant for disposal of solid fuel rocket engines. This time they seem to have found better rapport with local authorities. No one is protesting over threats to the environment or calling for a referendum. Negotiations proceed in secrecy. Nobody will inform the public of preparations for this sequel to events of 1995-1997.

Americans on Komsomolsky Prospect

THIS detective story begins on a late December evening in 2002, on the streets of Perm. A local journalist, who once lived in the States, noticed a group of respectable-looking gentlemen, one of them black, on Komsomolsky Prospect. He drew a logical conclusion that they must be English-speaking foreigners. He approached them for small talk and asked where they were from. They responded that they were here on a peace mission – to destroy, at their own expense, our nuclear missiles.

At about the same time, the central media began reporting on the demise of a project to build a rocket disposal plant in the Udmurt Republic, eight kilometers from the city of Votkinsk. The Americans, after investing \$87 millions in the state-owned Votkinsky Plant, were forced for political reasons to abandon construction. What happened there repeated Perm's experience of 1995-1997. It was election campaigning season there, as it had been earlier in Perm. The local administration, in order to stay in power, was ready to sacrifice \$400 million in investments that the rockets disposal program would have brought. The Perm scenario was reproduced to a "t": slogans calling for clear skies overhead, citizens of the proud city of Votkinsk meeting, a city дума resolution for a referendum, the decision of the Supreme Court of the Udmurt Republic to cancel the referendum.

The dynamics of the battle are best illustrated with headlines from Perm's press in 1999. They began innocuously "Experiment with an Udmurt Accent," and a bit

mockingly “Our Missiles will be Screwed Properly.” Then the headlines became rather tense: “Environmentalists Hold Project’s Fate” and “Can Dioxin Poisoning Be Avoided?” Finally, they accelerated to “A Ghost Walks Votkin’s Wasteland” and “Our City is Featured in the Internet” and “The Time Has Come to Arm Ourselves with Sticks.”

The March 2002 resolution by the head of the Udmurt government, Yuri Pitkevich, annulling the decision to build the disposal plant put Russia in a difficult situation. Under START-1 and START-2 treaties, we are required to destroy part of the strategic nuclear missiles arsenal inherited from the Soviet Union, and without outside help at that. However, since the United States is interested in reducing the arsenal of its former adversary, and in accordance with the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program of 1991, the United States has offered to contribute significantly to the cause. A \$10-billion program to dispose of Soviet chemical weapons is already being implemented. A program to utilize nuclear warheads is also proceeding without major controversy. But the program to dispose of the missiles themselves, more precisely their bodies and their fuel, has failed twice to get off ground.

Passing the buck to the governor

It did not take long to find Perm enterprises to negotiate with the Americans. There is no need to build a new plant in Perm; everything needed for the facility is here already. The manufacturing conglomerate Iskra develops and produces rocket engines and the Kirov plant in Zakamsk produces rocket fuel. In fact, in the mid-1990s the Kirov R&D Department was to have completed tests of environmentally safe disposal of rocket engines with financial support from the Americans. Prior to that, they conducted open-air tests, with exhaust of the engines released straight into the atmosphere.

Sources requesting anonymity have told me that this time the primary contractor will be the Mashinostroitel Chemical Plant. It was to the chemical plant that I made my first telephone call.

Since Vladimir Lomaev, the plant’s director general, was away on a business trip until the end of January, no one would take it upon himself to comment on the story I had heard from the strolling Americans. True, no one denied that negotiations were in progress: “There is no contract. Better to call in a few months, even better in a half a year. Then we could talk about specifics.” That was the response despite unconfirmed reports that one rocket was being utilized at that very moment and six other were in the pipeline. A formal inquiry sent to the director on January 30 remains unanswered. Dur-

ing one of the conversations, a plant official even made a seemingly casual reference to Grigory Pasko,¹ a journalist, recently released from prison.

Happily, representatives of the Kirov plant and the Iskra conglomerate proved more cooperative. Iskra's chief design engineer, Mikhail Sokolovsky, said that his organization's participation in the program would be confined largely to technical documentation to see the project through to completion. In collaboration with Perm State University of Technology, Iskra has developed technology for pyrolysis and utilization of composite materials. Their development was awarded a gold medal at the World Exhibition of Innovation, Research and New Technologies in Brussels in 2002. Employing their technology, those parts of missiles that are made of composite materials can be converted into hydrocarbons and recycled, instead of burying the material as was done before. Later, the utilization furnace could serve second duty for garbage disposal, which would help solve a considerable problem for the city of Perm.

Plans to complete the furnace construction with money provided by the Uncle Sam are, unfortunately, no longer viable. Six years ago, the Americans were still willing to talk about financial support, but now it is too late. Experience in the Urmurt Republic has taught the Americans to stop playing sugar daddy. Now they talk tough: here is the money, here is the technology by Lockheed-Martin, go burn the rockets. They are not even interested now in what will happen to the burned out rockets. The only requirement is that there should be no fuel left in them.

In the same fashion, the R&D Department at the Kirov plant (also known as the Polymers Research Institute) has been left without American investments, although it continues plodding along on the environmentally clean rocket test facility for burning out rocket fuel. The head of the institute, Anatoly Talalaev, says that the many-year construction project will be concluded in 2003. The facility, which is being built exclusively with Russian money will be used exclusively to serve Russia's needs. Talalaev did mention the 770 million rubles that had passed by the institute in 1995, but he sounded bitter and unwilling to elaborate on the matter. In any case, he did not deny that rocket utilization is coming back to Perm.

While either Iskra or the Polymers Research Institute could have easily become the lead organization in the utilization program, neither of them has stepped forward. Those

¹ Grigory Pasko, a journalist and a naval officer who worked for a newspaper published by the Pacific fleet, was arrested in 1997 on charges of treason. After almost two years in detention, he was acquitted. In 2001 he was tried again on the same charges and sentenced to four years in a labor camp. He was released after serving 13 month of the sentence. It is widely believed that Pasko was persecuted for exposing environmentally damaging practices by the Pacific fleet. These included release of radioactive waste into the ocean.

burned by the rocket scandal of the mid-1990s have become very cautious about the word utilization. The buck gets passed to the regional administration, where political decisions must be made. It was the present governor's team that had nearly been swept away by popular anti-rocket sentiment and almost went to a referendum over the issue.

This isn't Udmurt

The rockets will have to be utilized somewhere. Since there are only two places where suitable conditions for their disposal can be found, Perm and Biisk,² the work will fall to one of them. For face-saving reasons, the project will be presented to the public in its best possible light, and with all the benefits to the Kama³ area that Perm will derive.

At the moment, however, it is not easy to make this look good. The Americans are not likely to finance the environmentally safety testing and disposal facilities in Zakamsk or the Iskra pyrolysis program. What is left then: disposal by the old gold standard, *al fresco*, with all the ensuing environmental consequences? What have we been fighting for, one may ask.

Of course the public's perception has changed since 1995. In that long-ago time, simply hearing the words destruction of rockets, the man in the street would imagine a nuclear mushroom over Perm. He would turn a deaf ear to arguments that warheads are disposed of at other locations, and that no traces of induced radiation have ever been found on the bodies of the rockets. The very wording of the question of the proposed referendum, "Would you agree to making Perm the site for utilization of strategic solid-fuel missiles?" was enough to shock residents. It was hardly a question to which anyone would respond yes.

Perhaps it would have been a different story if the arguments in favor had been presented on the referendum. There are many: utilized rockets will have their warheads removed; rockets have been burned in the vicinity of Perm for tens of years; utilization will be subjected to strict environmental control; most importantly, the Americans will invest hundreds of millions of dollars into the local economy, creating thousands of new jobs.

Today's problem is a different one: how to sweet-talk the Americans into investing at least something before they become entirely fed up and leave the Russians to clean up their nuclear stockpiles on their own.

The silence surrounding this project, as would be the case with any project of public importance, may destroy any remaining goodwill that the rocket utilization program

² A city in the Republic of Altai in Siberia.

³ The city of Perm stands on the Kama, a river in the Urals.

may still enjoys with the public. If there is secrecy, then something is wrong. It would be much better to respond directly and honestly to questions arising in connection with renewed negotiations with the Americans.

The first question concerns what volume of utilization we are talking about. Then: Should the Americans finance only open-air fuel burning? Will the amount of exhaust fit into the Russia's environmental standards? Is funding adequate to resolve environmental issues? What is Russia's share of the program and is it fully financed? What are the proposed procedures for environmental oversight? How will the rocket bodies be utilized?

I have heard various views regarding the program during my investigation of this topic, including some unabashedly anti-American perspectives. Top brass at the Kirov plant, recalling America's unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistics Missiles Treaty, favor stopping all utilization and putting the missiles in storage, just in case they become needed.

So far no one is suggesting that all 916 mid-flight engines from redundant missiles must be utilized in Perm. There are vague rumors that the negotiations now underway with the Mashinostroitel plant concern only the Ukrainian missiles, that is, the SS-22 missiles formerly based in Ukraine. At this point, it is worth noting that Ukraine is utilizing rockets with American financing using hydro-monitors, a technology that the Thiokol Corp developed. It is said that the water coming out of the process is so clean it is re-used for fish husbandry.

In the corridors of our regional administration, an idea is circulating to build a processing plant in the Kama area similar to the Thiokol Corp-Ukraine facility so that we, too, could avoid open-air burning and the environmental problems that accompany it. This would be a help to the depressed Kizelovsky coal basin, which is under consideration as a possible site. Taking into account all existing programs, this is the most expensive, but it would give the Americans a guarantee that the money they spend will go exclusively to disarmament. The indoor burning facility of the Polymers Institute can be used for rocket testing, but the hydro-monitor's only function is destruction.

The rumor that twenty apartments have already been bought to house the Americans is an indication that the foreigners have returned to Perm. The rumor, so far, has been impossible to confirm.

Well, let's go for a stroll on Perm's streets.



ON THE ROAD
TO DEMOCRACY

Victor Guschin (Moscow)

We Are Not Idiots – The Idiots Are Not Us



*Zhurnal*ist, № 8, 2003

This article deals with the peculiar Russian laws banning free political speech for all but officially recognized political candidates during the duration of any official election campaign period.

Paragraph 7 of article 48 of the 2002 federal law “On Elections” prohibits journalist from publishing material during an election campaign that intentionally or unintentionally agitates for or against a political candidate or party. The 2005 revisions to the law have softened this prohibition somewhat, but it is unclear what effect, if any, this will have on the elections of 2008.

The relatively liberal 1999 law on presidential elections referred to in the article appears to restrict paid political advertising in mass media to official candidates. The 2002 election law put additional restrictions on election campaigning: paragraph 5 of article 48, in conjunction with other articles of the law, can and have been interpreted as prohibiting any election campaigning other than that financed through election funds of officially recognized candidates. In this context, controversy has arisen over the right to campaign for the “none of the above” option. At the time of this article’s publication, the option was required on the ballot.

The Constitutional Court, in a November 2005 decision, upheld the right of citizens to vote against all nominated candidates, that is, to vote for none of the above. The court failed, however, to strike down laws effectively prohibiting election campaigning by citizens or organizations not affiliated with an official political candidate. By implication, this prohibited campaigning against all the candidates. In a decision on June 16, 2006, the Constitutional Court upheld these laws.

The State Duma does not appear to have acted on a directive from the Constitutional Court to provide legal basis for campaigning against all the candidates. In July 2006 the State Duma removed the option of none of the above from the ballot in regional and federal elections.

IN Ancient Greece, those who did not take part in elections were called idiots. But we are taking part! On what basis then, do I am assert that eight million voters have been denied their rights already, and the next elections will double that figure?

For the fourth year in a row, I am waging a fierce war with Chairman of the Central Elections Commission Alexander Veshnyakov in defense of my constitutional voting rights. I do not mean the right to push a ballot through a narrow slit that looks exactly like the aiming slit of a gun shield and into a ballot urn.¹ (Can't we find a better word for that thing?) That right we enjoy, though not its consequences.

It is not my vote but my voice as a voter that cannot be cast. During an election campaign, I cannot tell my fellow citizens why I am going to vote for one or another candidate, or why I intend to tick off the box on the none of the above line. This is my misfortune and the misfortune of millions of voters. Until the implementation of Sergei Shoigu's² proposal to strip the citizenship of everybody who willfully refuses to vote or votes for none of the above, Russians can cast their votes or abstain from voting. But we may not advocate for the choices we intend to make.

As for me, from the moment the none of the above option appeared on the ballot, that is, beginning with the December 1995 State Duma elections, I have always chosen it. The State Duma elections of 1995 and 1999, the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000, the Moscow mayoral and city council elections (twice); you name it, and I'll tell you that I voted for none of the above. And not a single time during these election campaigns, did I have a chance to explain my choice to my fellow citizens.

Am I complaining that I, a professional journalist, have been denied freedom of speech? Not really. But the matter is, I can enjoy this freedom only between elections. Do you want to express your opinion? You are welcome. But not when it really matters – during the election campaign. The moment the election campaign officially begins, any opinion voiced by a voter becomes election campaigning, which he or she is not entitled to conduct. The voter risks trespassing on the sovereign territory of the chairman of the Central Election Commission. The chairman becomes the sole judge of what is election campaigning and what is not, who has the right to speak and who should remain silent.

To have any voice in an election campaign, one must first become an official participant in that campaign, obtain state campaign financing with which to pay for campaign publications. Then you may campaign to your heart's content for none of the above or for a jack-in-the-box, if you like. But if you wish to do this for free and without authorization, you are a subversive. As a lawbreaker, you will be punished and may even face criminal prosecution.

These were the issues that drove me to enter a court battle against Veshnyakov. The Supreme Court heard my complaint on March 26, 2000, on the eve of the presidential election campaign that gave victory to Vladimir Putin. And this is what I said in court:

¹ A ballot box is called a ballot urn in Russian.

² Sergei Shoigu, a popular and influential politician, heads the Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Disaster Relief.

Your Honors! There are eleven candidates for the post of the President of Russia. I do not see among them a single candidate whose political platform has been clearly stated and who has demonstrated a grasp of the political and managerial functions of the presidency, demonstrated a candidate's appreciation of the importance of the step he is taking and the responsibilities it entails. All eleven candidates speak about the same things: how to improve the economic, social, political and cultural situations, the public's hygiene and the epidemiological environment, and many other problems that afflict Russia. But we are not electing the ministers of Economic Development or Labor or Culture or Agriculture or Environmental Protection or the chief specialist on venereal disease prevention. For those jobs, we can always find good specialists. We need a president who understands how the machinery of State functions, how the Constitution of the Russian Federation functions, how to improve this country's laws. We have to be assured that he is capable of the art of managing society and the country and that his thinking is at the level required of a president. I respect all eleven candidates, as a group and individually, for their personal and business qualities, but I don't see a deserving candidate among them. I am not going to vote for anyone just to see that somebody is elected. I would like to advise others not to as well. Please answer me, Your Honors, do I have the right as a voter and a responsible citizen to make this appeal to my fellow citizens and voters?

This is the slightly abridged text of the Supreme Court's decision:

The argument advanced by the plaintiff, V.V. Guschin, asserting that promulgation by the Chairman of the Central Election Commission of the provisions of paragraph 2 of article 44 (of the law "On Presidential Elections") that regulate election campaigning by official participants in a campaign violates a citizen's right to freedom of expression and the right to freely cast his votes cannot be accepted. The statement to the press made by chairman of the Central Election Commission³ concerning legal provisions regulating use of mass media in election campaigning, including those pertaining to calls to vote against all candidates, is in full accord with the provisions

³ This is a reference to Alexander Veshnyakov's statement made during a TV appearance in early March 2000, on the eve of the presidential election campaign. He warned voters against campaigning for the none of the above option and threatened criminal prosecution of those who advocated for this choice on charges of obstructing the exercise of voting rights, article 141 of the Criminal Code.

stated by the federal law “On Elections of the President of the Russian Federation.”

The Supreme Court went on to assert that the law permits election campaigning in mass media only by officially registered candidates, or in their name, as spending for these purposes must be paid from by election funds of the candidate. (Archives of the Supreme Court, GKPI 2000-316, March 27, 2000⁴).

So if you are not a candidate, if you are not on Veshnyakov’s list, if you have not received campaign funds from the Central Election Commission, you may not campaign for anyone. The constitutional freedom of speech granted to every Russian citizen and the constitutional right to express your will and your opinion DIRECTLY (not subject to authorization from above) in the course of free elections and referenda⁵ count for nothing.

New elections are coming. There will be gubernatorial elections in St. Petersburg in September then parliamentary elections in December. Presidential elections will take place in March 2004. But those who oppose all the candidates will not have their voices heard, because the Central Election Commission will never register a candidate called None of the Above.

In 1999, on a business trip in Vologda, I cast an absentee ballot for none of the above. If not for me and others like me, the State Duma would have been short twenty or more members. Elections in some single-deputy constituencies would not have attracted a sufficient number of voters. Who is to say that we, the none of the above crowd, are pathological obstructionists rejecting out of hand any candidate whatsoever. Perhaps we are casting a protest vote, not against personalities, but against a system that has failed to make loafers work hard and bribe-takers work honestly. Perhaps our concern is public good. But we must keep our opinions to ourselves or risk being caught by Veshnyakov, who would like to see us convicted on criminal charges.

Since we cannot speak out, it looks as if we do not exist. That is not the case. Eight million people cast ballots marked none of the above in the last State Duma election. In eight federal voting districts, elections failed because the majority of votes were cast for the none of the above candidate. Some informed people think that the number would increase at least twofold in the next parliamentary elections. It means the none-of-the-above party will number 16 million to 18 million members. This is almost as many members as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union used to have. All of us have been

⁴ Paragraph 2 of the article 44 of the law “On Presidential Elections” states that “election campaigning on television and in printed periodicals should be paid for by corresponding election funds of the registered candidate,” which may leave room for other interpretations.

⁵ Unfortunately, the Russian Constitution contains no such norm.

stified. The law that did it is no longer a hypothetical threat; it passed the State Duma in June under pressure from the Central Election Commission. The president has not yet signed it, but in practice the law is already functioning.⁶

I am not being overdramatic. Not a bit. Let me quote a message we, the Association of Regional Newspaper Editors, received from Belgorod on the eve of gubernatorial elections there:

On Thursday morning at 3 a.m., security guards detained a group of young people who were pasting leaflets. They included a young woman, a student from the local university, an advertising agency employee and an unemployed individual. The police were delighted to discover that the leaflets called for a none-of-the-above vote in the up-coming gubernatorial elections. The regional Prosecutor's Office has opened a criminal case against these young people, charging them under article 280 of the Criminal Code with making 'public appeals to commit extremist actions.' Conviction could get them up to three years of imprisonment. A reliable source reported that before the Chief Prosecutor approved the measure, he consulted 'the very top' and got a green light to arrest the young people as a warning to others not to distribute leaflets with unhelpful appeals.

On June 26 Alexander Veshnyakov, speaking at a press-conference at the Fund for Free Elections, said that the new amendments to the election law had been given a test drive at the just completed gubernatorial elections in Belgorod Oblast and had shown splendid performance.

What results did this test drive actually show? E. Savchenko, the incumbent candidate, won a convincing victory. But there was one fly in the ointment: ten percent of Belgorod's voters voted for none of the above. In Sary Oskol, the most prosperous city in the region, almost twice as many voted for none of the above. Nothing like that had ever happened in Sary Oskol before. Is this the splendid performance the Central Election Commission is working to achieve in the September, December and March elections?

⁶ Apparently, a reference to amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation passed by the State Duma on June 27, 2002, and signed by President Putin on July 25. The amendments change the wording of article 280: the punishable "public appeals for a forcible seizure of state power, its forcible retention, or for a forcible change of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation" was substituted with the much vaguer and wider in scope "public appeals to commit extremist actions." The author could also mean other laws passed by the duma at about the same time; these provide sanctions for various violations of election campaigning laws, such as, suspension of mass media outlets and fines and prison sentences for campaign financing irregularities.

Konstantin Katanyan (Moscow) The Silence of Press Sharks



Vremya MN, June 19, 2003

The press has been muzzled for the duration of an election campaign

PRESS coverage of an election campaign has become dangerous business. A media outlet can be closed temporarily for violating laws that are in effect during an election campaign.

The so-called president's amendments, which were actually prepared by the Central Election Commission, were approved by a vote of 358 members of the State Duma yesterday. Voting by a vast majority, the State Duma completed the process of barring citizens and the mass media from participation in the election process. There can be no talk now of free and democratic elections in the Russian Federation. Lawmaker have shamelessly violated our constitutional right to comment on the programs that parties and independent candidates put forth, to forecast election results and to warn other voters of the consequences of victory of a particular political party. Any publication containing comments and forecasts of that kind will be considered election campaigning and, therefore, prohibited by law for all but officially registered candidates, parties and party blocks. The press sharks and the ordinary citizen are denied the opportunity to publicly state their views on the candidates. Moreover, now any magazine or newspaper, any television or radio broadcaster can be sanctioned for statements "intended to encourage or encouraging the voter to vote for or against a candidate or a list of candidates."¹

The law, therefore, does not merely forbid election campaigning by mass media, it intrudes upon freedom of thought and expression. It empowers bureaucrats and judges

¹ Restrictions on mass media described in this paragraph had been put in the books a year earlier, with the passage of the June 12, 2002, law "On Basic Guarantees of Voting Rights." The amendments to which the author refers introduced sanctions for violations of this law. A few months after this article was published, the author and others won partial victory in Constitutional Court. On October 30, 2003, the court struck down the clause concerning statements "intended to encourage or encouraging the voter to vote for or against a candidate or a list of candidates." Other restrictions, however, have been left intact.

The 2005 revision to the law "On Basic Guarantees of Voting Rights." Reflected the court's decision and softened, somewhat, other restrictions by providing that only repeated publications of certain kinds constitute election campaigning.

to pass questionable judgments as to whether a journalist or an author of a letter to an editor intended to influence the readers to change their voting preferences on the eve of elections. If, after reading the author's mind, the bureaucrat or judge concludes that the author did have this intention, the media outlet will be punished. A media outlet that commits two or more violations during an election or referendum campaign can be suspended until the end of the campaign. This is the essence of amendments the State Duma passed in the third and final hearing yesterday. Since the country is perpetually engaged in one election campaign or another, regional or federal, media outlets that authorities look unfavorable on can be kept in constant fear and disorganization by closing them for a month or two several times a year.

The heads of state-owned media risk becoming outcasts in the journalism community. For repeated violations of election campaigning rules, they can be disqualified for a period ranging from two to three years. In fact, violations of election campaigning laws can be found in any publication. This is true even when publications have little to do with the elections. If it reports on plentiful harvest, then the newspaper or magazine is campaigning for the Agrarian Party. An article that calls attention to low wages agitates for the Communists. An article that mentions delay in pension payments campaigns against the party United Russia, which has promised to deal with the issue. It is sufficient to accept an advertisement for apple juice to qualify as a covert supporter of the party Yabloko (apple in Russian).

The amendment package includes changes to the law "On Charitable Activities and Charitable Organizations." They prohibit charitable activities for the duration of an election campaign.² The Criminal Code is amended with new articles that provide sanctions for "falsification of elections results," and the Code of Administrative Violations is amended with sanctions for abusing privileges of a government office to promote a candidate or a referendum issue during an election campaign. These amendments establish criminal liability for abuses in campaign financing and for fabrication of election documents.

At the same time, the State Duma unwittingly decided to toughen criminal and administrative sanctions for "dangerous deeds infringing on the voting rights of citizens." Unwittingly, because the dangerous deeds, first and foremost, describe the very lawmaking by the deputies who have turned our voting rights into fiction. If these amendments are adopted in the Federation Council,³ citizens will have to fight in courts against the lawmakers drunk on administrative ecstasy or, at a minimum, vote against them in the next December's elections.

² Actually, the amendment reads "The combining of charitable activities and election campaigning or campaigning on issues of a referendum is prohibited."

³ They passed and were signed into law by the president on July 4, 2003.

Mikhail Afanasyev (Abakan) Disneyland in the Khakasia Princedom



Webzine *NatsBez.ru*, July 26, 2004

THE UAZ Land Rover inches its way uphill. The hill looks impassable even on foot, but this civie tank moves as if it encounters no obstacles. Occasionally we hit old trunks of fallen trees, causing us to bang our heads on the roof. It is possible to get out of the car without stopping and to walk alongside it for a while, but after a 15-minute walk our legs are tired, and we are soaked to the knees. The scenery is unimaginably beautiful: the taiga's zharki (*Asian globeflower*), stately firs, birches bent flirtatiously and slender threads of the taiga brooks. The air carries aromas that cannot be inhaled elsewhere on earth; dust and car exhaust from the city air are released from your lungs with the first breath.

We have driven 400 kilometers from Abakan to the Kartoshsko-Ineysky preserve in the Republic of Khakasia. The preserve is intended to protect and replenish deer, fox and black and wood grouses. During the winter, this is the congregating place for most of the hoofed animals and birds of Khakasia. The Khakasia government decree № 146 prohibits almost all kinds of human activity here. It forbids:

- hunting
- cutting trees in grouse mating areas and on calving grounds
- using fertilizers and pesticides
- collecting zoological samples
- allotting land for construction (except for the nature conservation) or cultivation
- driving and parking off-road
- camping beyond specially designated areas
- haying and cattle grazing
- constructing buildings and facilities (except for the nature conservation), roads (except for forestry and fire prevention), power lines and other utility infrastructure

Yes, we are, inadvertently, breaking some rules. We have been driving for the last 12 hours. There is no road, just a carpet of flowers, and not a single bent grass blade. Now we pass between two birches, now dive into a gully, now we ford a mountain spring without slowing our pace.

What are we doing in the Kartoshsko-Ineysky preserve? We are pursuing leads. We have heard from many sources that here in the preserve someone has built a super-class resort called Elk. Allegedly, the head of the Wildlife and Game Management Directorate for the Republic of Khakasia, Sergei Mashukov, issued the permit to build the resort to Oleg Zimin, head of Elk, Inc. and director of the resort. Oleg Zimin is a nephew of Victor Zimin, the deputy director for construction of the Abakan branch of the Krasnoyarsk Railways. Some say that Victor Zimin actually owns the Elk, that the resort has been built to curry favors with useful people from Khakasia and from Russia as well, by providing them luxury accommodations and hunting in the pristine taiga. This would explain why the local bureaucracy and law enforcement are getting away with this outrageous offense.

Still it is not those details we are after. We want to find and see for ourselves this super-class resort.

“Guys, this is all, I can’t go any further. You can walk, if you want to,” the driver says with an apologetic shrug of his shoulders. We tell him it is no problem, we will walk; it should not be far; we have already crossed nearly the entire preserve. We put on our gear, take the photo and video cameras and, in the company of two hunters, start along a gully. In about an hour, we see from the first hillock we have climbed, surprisingly, a herd of horses. How did the horses get here we wonder? The next surprise is a freshly made dirt road and something that looks like a water soaked circle beside it.

“What is that,” I ask one of the guides.

“It is a *solonetz*. Here they put salt to attract elk, deer or maral. And look here this birch has a ladder nailed to it, leading to a hiding place between the branches. An animal comes to lick the salt and gets shot at from up there. This is how the top brass hunts.”

What is there to say. A cool way to hunt in a nature preserve. We have to move on, though not before we photograph the hunting setup from all angles. We barely move 200 meters away from the *solonetz* when one of the guides stops and cocks his head, listening and pointing his finger. An elk, perhaps. But the guide says, “a tractor.” Indeed, after listening closely I, too, hear the sound of a tractor laboring.

“Okay, guys,” the guide commands, “let’s get up as high up as we can so that we’re above the place the tractor comes from. Then, we’ll come down nice and quiet, without breaking a single twig. Looks like we found what you’ve been looking for.” And we start to run up the hill.

We climb higher and higher. While I struggle to breathe and keep my heart from jumping out of my chest, the guide signals us to stop. Now we are moving along the side of the hill,

toward the sound of the tractor's engine, in the guide's footsteps, looking around and watching our feet. The clatter of the engine becomes louder, and we begin our descent. The guide smiles and points to the treetops below us. I see, I see. Some 300 meters down the slope there are house roofs. As we go lower, we get a better view of beautiful large houses and lawns and arbors between the trees — and I see the big and silly smiles grow on the faces of my comrades. Perhaps I am wearing a big, silly smile too. This is what they call hunting fever. We drop all the gear we will not need to the ground, everything but our cameras. We are now so close that we can see most of the resort.

This is no ordinary resort. It looks like a place designed to make all your wishes come true. Truly a nature preserve of a different kind! Not a regular one, where construction (except for the nature conservation) and roads (except for forestry and fire prevention) are prohibited, where there can be no power lines or other utility infrastructure. Here the visitor can have all his heart desires: a beautiful house equipped with a satellite dish and sauna, a large clubhouse, Jeeps with enormous-sized wheels and other off-road vehicles. Bulldozers are clearing grounds for more construction. This is a dream for any vacationer. Who needs Cyprus or Egypt; they pale in comparison.

Like wood spirits dressed in fatigues, we begin to move stealthily from tree to tree. Fortunately, a bulldozer drowns the clicks of our cameras. It is dangerous to get any closer, but hunting fever is stronger than fear. From a five-meter distance, one of my colleagues and I begin descending to the nearest house. The guards and construction workers are crowded at the opposite end of the settlement, so we have a chance to film most of the resort. We are just a half-meter from the house when two guards begin to move in our direction, walking fast and talking between themselves. My colleague throws himself on the ground, face down, but all I can do is to push my back quietly against the outcrop of the hill. There is no time to do anything else. In a silly gesture, I press a finger to my lips to warn my colleague, as if he is about to break into a song. Now, we are waiting anxiously for the moment we will be discovered. The guards are coming closer. In another three meters, they will see us. Suddenly, they stop. Without breaking their conversation, they begin to relieve themselves. Having finished with that business, they turn and leave. Could it be that they have not seen us? As soon as they are a safe distance away, we begin to leave quietly. We leave a mysterious place where nothing is to be disturbed, not even a flower, but where someone has built facilities for active R&R, where bulldozers are crashing through taiga and destroying breeding grounds of animals some of which are protected species; where hunters roam taiga in Jeeps, mowing down already diminished animal populations.

The Wildlife and Game Management Directorate for the Republic of Khakasia is supposed to oversee, maintain and safeguard the inviolability of the preserve. But it seems they don't think much of this responsibility.

Why doesn't the Prosecutor's Office of Khakasia get involved? I don't even want to guess. Here is an excerpt from a letter sent by First Deputy Prosecutor of Khakasia Ma-keev, to the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation: "I am hereby informing you that M.V. Afanasyev's complaint concerning alleged violations of law by the Khakasia Wildlife and Game Management Directorate addressed to the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation have been investigated. The arguments put forward in the complaint have been investigated repeatedly in the past, and once again they have been found groundless."

I used to wonder why they don't create an independent commission, composed of, say, representatives of the Wildlife Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, scientists of the Russian Research Institute of the Academy of Agriculture, the Khakasia government representatives and the Office of the Prosecutor General (since the local prosecutor prefers not to see the obvious)? Why don't they put the activities of the Khakasia wildlife directorate under scrutiny?

I know that the Khakasia government is interested in having the Wildlife and Game Management Directorate investigated. I know that honest game wardens and many other people who, in one way or another, have had an encounter with this outrage want the investigation too. Let the commission check the facts, visit the place we have visited. Scientists have completed a study on populations and reproductive rates of wild animals of Khakasia. All these facts are known.

But those who consider themselves shadow rulers of Khakasia are dead set against the investigation.

What I am about to say in conclusion is without over dramatization or self-promotion, nothing but an appreciation of the basic facts of life in Khakasia: if, in the near future, I am imprisoned on drug charges or for some other crime, it will mean that in the battle with the shadow princes of Khakasia, victory was not ours.¹

¹ Mikhail Afanasyev has been criminally prosecuted for libel and fined. In December 2004 he spent two days in detention. Reportedly, he is facing another libel trial.

Mikhail Afanasyev (Abakan) A Friend of Nature



Webzine *NatsBez.ru*, September 16, 2003

THERE is hardly anyone in Khakasia today who remembers where Sergei Mashukov, the head of the Khakasia Wildlife and Game Management Directorate, came from. A former highway police officer, fired from the force (word is that he was caught taking a bribe), when shaping his future, he probably decided to unite with nature to replenish his life's energies. He placed his bets well. After graduating from a college, Mashukov was appointed the head of the Khakasia Wildlife and Game Management Directorate. It proved to be a stroke of good fortune. Though Mashukov has not become a big boss, but rather a smallish one, both big bosses and very big bosses like to hunt. This is how he began to win friends, great and small, in all shapes and sizes.

What makes Mashukov so special, so indispensable for his friends?

He supplies, for example, business executives (for a fee?) with official officers' badges from the Wildlife and Game Management Directorate (presumably, they are voluntary game rangers). He has a team of fishermen catching valuable species of fish for him. Mashukov himself directs the nature preserve's staff to herd animals listed in Russia's Red Book of endangered species so that he and his friends can shoot them at close distance. His relatives are taken care of: they receive gifts of garages for their cars and expensive apartments. The list of Mashukov's contributions to welfare of the Khakasia wildlife goes on and on.

But what is most interesting is the universal certainty that neither Mashukov nor his relatives are in danger of being punished for their acts. Although, as Alexei Lebed, the head of the government of the Republic of Khakasia, aptly said, "by selling licenses, the Wildlife and Game Management Directorate has transformed itself from a controlling body into a business enterprise."

Everybody believes that Mashukov is unsinkable. But in addition to the law enforcement agencies that should be investigating Mashukov and have not, there is the patience of the people to reckon with. Sooner or later, it will run out.

While we wait, let's consider the less visible irregularities in the functioning of the directorate – the financial ones. Take the mysterious disappearance of large chunks

of the directorate's budget allocations. To take one aspect, since 1998 large sums of the budget have been expended for travel expenses for the directorate's staff. But in the last five years, the regular wildlife officers of the directorate have not seen any of that money. Though a selected few do receive them regularly. Or take purchases of ammunition. According to the deputy head of the directorate, Vladimir Melekhin, during just the year 2000, the directorate spent 107,732 rubles on ammunition, which is strange, since the directorate does not even have authorization from the police to purchase ammunition.

How about vehicle purchases? We hear that the directorate, out of concern for the needs of its employees, has bought them fourteen cars. If this continues, soon every wildlife officer in Khakasia will, perhaps, drive an official vehicle. But an audit of expenditures for purchase of the vehicles has shown that the money was simply stolen. The directorate's 2001 financial report claims that 511,000 rubles were spent to buy four cars, but no one has seen them. Instead, the directorate's staff watched Mashukov, no doubt with a feeling of pride in their chief, driving around in an expensive import, a Toyota Land Cruiser. In 1999 a considerable amount of money was appropriated to buy a UAZ vehicle. Three years later, it turned out that the car was, in fact, a gift of a coal mining company.

To add to the picture, the directorate is financed fully by the federal government, but retains whatever revenue it earns from selling hunting licenses. What happens to this money is anybody's guess.

There are more stories of this kind to tell, but is there a point to telling more of them? We understand perfectly well that that it is not how most of the money is made there. But how it is made, we will probably never learn.

* * *

Sergei Mashukov likes hunting. Once Mashukov escorted two managers from the Chernogorsk coal mine, Zibarev and Kuper, to the Kartoshsko-Ineysky preserve. It was off season for hunting, but Mashukov came with a gun. Seeing Mashukov and his pals shooting defenseless animals, the preserve's chief game warden, Shestakov, twice pleaded with Mashukov to stop the outrage. This did not please Mashukov. Upon returning to Abakan, he ordered Aleksandr Baev, the head of the directorate's rapid response team, and Alexander Kzyngashev, the chief game warden of the Ust-Abakan district, to find a pretext to fire Shestakov. Both refused and even tried to defend their colleague. Shestakov was, nevertheless, fired. Moreover, to settle the score for insubordination, Mashukov sent Baev and his team on a ten-day winter inspection of the Tashypsky district game preserve, without equipment, per diem allowances or guns. As if in jest, each was given an ax. The team traversed 170 kilometers of taiga on

foot in minus 30 temperatures. Two hours after returning to Abakan, they were sent out on another mission.

In May of this year, eleven staff members from the directorate appealed to the Russian Federal Department of Wildlife and Game and to the Chief Prosecutor of Khakasia to bring Mashukov to justice. Of the eleven, only five are still with the directorate.

* * *

Falconry is a favorite pastime of Arab sheiks, and their favorite hunting bird is the Saker Falcon. A Saker Falcon could fetch more than \$200,000, but since the bird is on the brink of extinction, their capture is permitted only for scientific purposes and in strictly limited quantities. In our country, the permits are issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources exclusively. But in Khakasia, Mashukov took it upon himself to issue permits authorizing Arabs to capture Saker Falcons.

In 2001 the Khakasia police detained two citizens of Arab countries in the Shitinsky district. The Arabs carried traps and pigeons used by poachers to capture birds of prey, falcons in particular. Both produced permits “to procure wild animals for scientific, educational, medical and other purposes, excluding hunting.” Strangely, both permits bore the same number, № 7, and they were signed by Mashukov and by Ivan Vishnevetsky, the chairman of the Khakasia State Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources. The permits listed species of birds the holders were allowed to trap. The goodhearted bureaucrats had given the Arabs permission to capture the rarest birds still inhabiting Khakasia: Eurasian Griffon, Saker Falcon, Steppe Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Gyr Falcon, Black Vulture and Upland Buzzard. The Arabs’ papers were in order and they were let go after paying a fine for breaking hunting rules. Two weeks later, three rangers in the Ust-Abakan district office apprehended another two Arabs after a long chase. They also produced the ubiquitous permits № 7, except now the permits bore official stamps of the Khakasia Wildlife and Game Management Directorate. The rangers had no choice but to let the Arabs go, after issuing them fine citations. Altogether, as sources within the rangers have told us, ten teams of poachers were simultaneously hunting for rare birds of prey in Khakasia.

The native population of Khakasia holds nature and wild life in the highest regard. Any mercenary approach to the riches of the lands of their ancestors, they take as personal insult. This, perhaps, explains why the chief game warden of Ust-Abakan, Alexander Kyzngashev, took the permits for the endangered birds to heart and forcibly demanded an explanation regarding issuance of the permits from Mashukov. Since then, Kyzngashev has fallen out of favor with Mashukov. Their relationship was not helped when,

in the beginning of this year, Kzyngashev and a team of wardens detained a group of hunters and took from them a blank bear hunting license signed by Mashukov. Ironically, Mashukov's notation on the license claimed he had confirmed the bear hunting with Kzyngashev.

* * *

Sergei Mashukov tells a story about how he befriended the president of the Russian Federation while was explaining to the federal Audit Office for the Republic of Khakasia the Toyota Land Cruiser that he has bought. Mashukov had made an official written account that he was advised by President Putin to purchase the expensive import. Responding to a question from the puzzled auditor, Mashukov explained that in April 2001 he was giving the president a ride and the president asked him, "Why are you driving this jalopy? Buy yourself a normal car."

And this is what really happened: Vladimir Putin was in Khakasia in March 2001. All of Khakasia's available law enforcement personnel were mobilized to cordon off the areas the president would visit. The Wildlife and Game Directorate was also assigned a spot. When the presidential cortege was returning to the road after sightseeing in the taiga, several jeeps, including the president's, became stuck in the springtime mud. Teasing the secret service men, the president got into the only Russian made car there, an UAZ at the end of the caravan, and with the words "this is the kind of cars we ought to be buying," drove off.

It turned out that both the UAZ and the driver belonged to the Wildlife and Game Directorate. But the driver was not Mashukov. This, however, did not stop Mashukov from playing this card to full advantage. His explanations regarding the purchase of this Toyota Land Cruiser are documented in the report from the Republic of Khakasia, Audit Office of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, dated June 7, 2002, concerning results of the audit of the Republic of Khakasia's Wildlife and Game Management Directorate for years 2001 and 2002.

The problem is that Mashukov is believed in Khakasia. Moscow is far away, and local bureaucrats are well aware that Putin had, indeed, visited Khakasia. Who wants to quarrel with a friend of the president? But to be Putin's friend is not enough for Mashukov. Word is circulating that Mashukov is also an old friend of the head of the Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Disaster Relief, Sergey Shoigu. That could be. Shoigu used to work in constructions in Khakasia, and many here remember him and know him personally. According to our sources, however, during a meeting between Shoigu and Alexei Lebed at training exercises for Siberian regional emergency workers, Shoigu told Lebed, "Mashukov uses me here as a shield, but I never cover for him and never will."

* * *

At first glance, Sergei Mashukov looks like just a slick, happy-go-lucky manipulator. In fact, he enjoys considerable influence in Khakasia. This is evidenced by the fact that only Lebed dares to oppose him openly. And Mashukov is not afraid to respond in kind, believing perhaps that a chief game warden of the republic has better chances to win.

Interviewing sources for this article was more like a spy thriller: meetings in the night, in dark corners, in moving cars. I came across some “well-wishers,” who advised me not to mess with a “respected person everyone is happy with.” They tried to convince me that removal of Mashukov could hurt some federal bureaucrats who enjoy hunts in the Khakasia forests, hinting that Mashukov has something on them. I don’t know how much of that is true, but the fact remains: nobody is in a hurry to take a stand against Mashukov – just to play it safe.

Veronika Shakhova (Blagoveschensk) Aggression Breeds Aggression



Zerkalo, December 16, 2004

The events described in this article occurred in Blagoveschensk in the Republic of Bashkortostan, 1,100 kilometers east of Moscow. Blagoveschensk has a population of 33,000. Ms. Shakhova's was the first report on what was to become one of the most highly publicized stories of police brutality in Russia. For three days, the local police joined by special police forces conducted mass, indiscriminate roundups in the town and neighboring villages. The roundups, perhaps better labeled a police rampage, were allegedly a response to an attack on a group of police officers. According to some reports, more than a thousand people were detained, beaten and tortured; dozens were hospitalized with serious injuries. Gang rapes of detained girls by the police were also reported.

Six months after breaking the story, Veronika Shakhova, the editor of the only independent newspaper in Blagoveschensk, was fired from her job.

I THINK no other town in Bashkortostan, or in the whole of Russia for that matter, spent Constitution Day quite like the town of Blagoveschensk. It seems unlikely that the male population of Blagoveschensk planned to spend the holidays with their hands above their heads like criminals, in police quarters, while their wives and girlfriend anxiously waited outside.

On Monday evening the central streets of the town looked deserted. Young people had moved from streets to courtyards and into doorways. There are visibly fewer taxis on the streets. Everyone is waiting for things to settle down. The events of the last few days have touched, directly or indirectly, practically every resident of Blagoveschensk. Children have invented a new game; they play OMON¹: sticks in hands, they chase each other shouting “hands on your head” and “get into the bus.” But many adults have heard these shouts for real!

Even before the last few days, many young people had negative attitudes toward men in uniform, but some would have been hard pressed to explain why. Having experienced the *besprede*² the police unleashed on everybody, including the under aged, they know the answer. The younger generation cannot meet such aggression on the part of people in masks³ with understanding and respect.

¹ Special purpose police detachment.

² A recent addition to Russian, literally “something without limits,” meaning, among other things, utter lawlessness and arbitrariness.

³ During an operation, OMON usually wear black masks and carry automatic rifles.

Young men who spent time in police quarters during those days know well that people who are entrusted to defend peaceful common folk do not always behave this way. Why have the forces of law and order treated residents of our town with such cruelty and sheer arbitrariness? I am not alone in being perplexed. Outraged and embittered residents of Blagoveschensk want explanations and an apology.

Eyewitnesses

Timur Valiullin, 17 and Artur Valiullin, 22

My brother and I were returning home late Friday evening. It was around midnight. These guys in fatigues suddenly ran up to us and began to beat us up with batons. Then they put us in a bus, and they drove us around town for two hours while we watched them round up everybody on the way. They put every passerby in the bus; they dragging people out of fast food places, bars and shops. In the police basement, we were put against the wall with our hands up. Since there was not enough space, they put us in two rows. They were taking people out one by one to finger print them and file detention reports. Many of those beaten were forced to sign affidavits that they had not suffered damages to their health.

We spent four hours standing against the wall, and we saw some terrible things happening. If anyone tried to say something about his rights, they would beat him to show him that he hasn't got any. This was two days ago, but my legs are still faltering and I have difficulty walking. That was our Constitution Day greeting from them.

Dmitry Bobrov, 23

On December 10, 2004, at 3.30 p.m., I was on my way to see my girlfriend, minding my own business. As I was passing 11/12 Komarov Street, a man in a uniform beckoned to me, and I was naive enough to approach him. They put me in a bus and took me to the police quarters. They said I was a drug addict, told me to undress to see if I had needle marks. While I was standing by the wall, my raised hands went to sleep. I moved them to relieve the tension and got hit on the head with a baton, and then someone struck my forehead against the wall. I am hazy about what happened next, but there were several of them and they kicked and beat me. After I got home the next day, my head started to hurt and the pain kept getting stronger; I kept losing consciousness because of it. My mother and my girlfriend called the ambulance. But in the hospital they just shrugged me away and told me to come back with an x-ray of my skull and blood tests. I am not going to let it be.

Citizen N.

I am not giving my name, and not because I am afraid for myself. These people are capable of anything and though I don't care about myself anymore, I have my wife and my child to think about.

Ours is a simple story, just something that was happening, apparently, all over Blagoveshensk. I was walking home with my wife and child after an evening with the friends. Near the Rassvet shop, we were attacked by an OMON detachment. I was pulled away from them and taken to the police quarters. As the result of my meeting with these guys in masks, I have bruises all over my body and a broken rib.

It is unlikely I will be protesting the violation of my rights and dignity to anybody. I don't think there is anybody out there who can protect us.

Marina, 16

I live with my grandmother and my brother. My mother passed away several years ago. We live in one of the two-storey buildings near the hospital.

My brother's friends came to visit him. Then there was a knock on the door, and when I opened it, some armed soldiers in masks stormed in. Before we could say anything, we found ourselves in a KAMAZ bus with OMON written on it. But we hadn't been doing anything bad! My brother's friend had just popped in to warm up. Well, they got warmed up, all right, at the police station. They let me go, because a woman working there knew me.

Dinar Gilmanov, 21

On December 10, 2004, I was assaulted on the street by the OMON. Everything happened quickly: they gave me several blows and I found myself in the police station. They took my fingerprints, kicked me some more and told me to leave. The result: bruised legs muscles and buttocks; now I am limping.

Vladimir M., 34

On December 11, 2004, at 8.30 p.m., we were on our way to the bus stop, the one near the pharmacy. Suddenly, some hulks in masks with batons and automatic rifles attacked us. In the police quarters, we stood still against the wall for five hours. There was a man standing beside me with one hand in a plaster cast, and he almost got his other hand broken too, by the police. When they were letting people go, the policemen would unleash the dogs and say, "Those of you who are quick enough have a chance to get away." They confiscated our mobile phones, so we couldn't call home. Here I quote them: "Do you know why you are here? To learn to respect the authorities!" That was their argument. This was some masked party they threw for the townspeople. From now on, our town and the whole district will love our authorities and our police wholeheartedly; we'll be mighty proud of them. We have been and will remain proud of living as free citi-

zens of a free country. And if there is somebody who is not sure he is free, he is welcome to pop into the police basement. Just five or six hours there will remove all doubts.

Anna, an assistant at the Computerland Internet Café

December 11, 2004, was my shift. Around nine in the evening, a man in civilian clothes came in; without introducing himself or showing any papers, he commanded, “Everybody up against the wall!” The frightened children and I froze. Then a masked man with a police stick came running in. There were three kids in the computer room, about 16 to 18 years old. They pulled one of them off the computer. They hit another kid on the legs and took him away. I was shocked, especially since this was happening in front of three- to five-year-old children who were playing there while their parents were in the arcade hall.

Blagoveschensk’s residents are still in deep shock from the *BESPREDEL* and the *OUT-RAGE* that has happened. Law enforcement bodies, the same people who are supposed to defend *OUR RIGHTS*, as Russian law guarantees them, perpetrated this.

Let me remind you that these events began on the eve of Constitution Day.⁴ On December 10 a detachment of OMON came to the town and held it in fear for several days, dictating its own rules and reigning over the town. Why they came, no one has yet explained.

The district newspaper *Panorama* has not printed a word of what happened in the town. What they did print were the Constitution Day greetings from the mayor, who said: “Dear town residents and villagers! I congratulate you from my heart on Constitution Day. We celebrate the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which eleven years ago laid the foundation for contemporary Russia and which guarantees citizens basic rights and liberties.”

The problem became apparent December 11, but the day before, on December 10, those very rights of ordinary Russian citizens guaranteed by the constitution were trampled on and destroyed. The town trembled from the tramping of OMON boots and the swish of their swinging truncheons. What rights and liberties was Mayor Nurtidinov talking about? Was he trying to be ironic? Was it possible that he did not know that nearly 500 innocent people had been arrested arbitrarily the evening and night before? That many of those arrested have become injured or maimed for life? The arrested have not been charged with anything, just fingerprinted and photographed. With whose knowledge has this outrage been inflicted on Blagoveschensk? For what sins did the OMON beat and humiliate our husbands, brothers and fathers?

⁴ December 12.

I will never believe that our mayor, A.A. Nurtidinov, did not know what was going on in his town. Nevertheless, he had the gall to talk about our rights guaranteed by the State. In fact, we have been shown, and made to understand once again, that an individual has no value in the eyes of the local government. Any of us can be humiliated, physically and morally with impunity.

Shame on town authorities with whose tacit consent LAWLESSNESS reigned in the town for several days. There is no justification for such behavior. Bandits and criminals should not be fought using the same methods they use; they cannot be fought by instilling in law-abiding citizens FEAR and HARTRED of authorities.

A horror movie

The testimonies that follow have not been edited. They are quoted here verbatim for the sake of the truth and the pain they convey.

Sasha and Ruslan, both 15

We were taken from Computerland on Saturday. They made us stand against the wall all night. It was very scary. When they brought us to the basement we were terrified by the scene: a piece of cloth soaked in blood on the floor, fragments of teeth, knocked out teeth. It was like a horror movie. They made us sign a paper that we were not harmed by OMON actions.

Igor Matrosov, 16

I was taken in Nizy, near the post office on Saturday. I had come for the weekend to stay with my parents. I ended up standing against a wall until morning. They beat me without leaving marks, but it still hurt a lot.

Andrei, 20

I went out to buy cigarettes at the kiosk near my house and ended up in an OMON bus. They warned us, "If anybody's mobile goes off, we will smash it without warning." They did not beat me too bad, but an acquaintance of mine, Sasha is his name, was beaten half to death.

Tselishev, an army private

I came home on a five-day leave. On Friday evening I went outside for a smoke, and the OMON grabbed me just outside my doorway. In the police basement, they beat me so badly that now I have to use crutches; one of the guys from OMON broke my leg. For a couple of days, I could not move; my body was one solid bruise.

Alfit Farvazov

We were having a birthday party for our friend, at his place. At two in the morning, the OMON burst into the apartment and took everybody to the police station. When we asked them on what grounds they were taking us, the OMON just hit us with their batons saying, “Are these sufficient grounds or do you want more?” While we were still in the apartment, a six-year-old boy ran up to his father, but an OMON threw him into the wall, and the boy’s nose started bleeding.

At the police station, they told us that the town was under curfew and nobody should be in the street after 11 p.m. and no lights in the apartments. There hadn’t been any announcements about any curfew.

I was held at the police station until morning, and then was taken to the hospital with multiple bruises. I still cannot move. Everything is bruised: my legs, back, buttocks, arms. My knees are swollen. In a word, I am a sight.

Radik, 16 and Ilvir, 17

We were taken from the pharmacy on Friday. They beat us and made us stand against a wall all night. The OMON bullied us: They sprayed tear gas into the bus when it was full of people. Then step out of the bus and laugh at us. When they were letting us go, they made us sign a paper that their actions had caused no harm to our health. Those who would not sign got beaten until they agreed.

Edik and Kostya, both 15

For us, it was kind of a game. We kept trying to run past the OMON without getting caught. But on Sunday we decided to let them catch us, and our dream came true. Unlike lots of others, we did not get beaten.

A. A. Yeremyan, from Ilyiana Polyana

My girlfriend and I went to a disco on Friday. About midnight the OMON arrived, marched all guys out of the disco and into a bus. On the way, they gave us some cuffs on the neck with their batons. They took 52 of us to the Blagoveschensk District Police Station. We spent five hours in the basement, against a wall, while they were filling forms, fingerprinting us, photographing us, making us get down on our knees and shout, “I love the police.” All that time we would get beaten for as much as moving a finger. One guy collapse with an epileptic seizure, and I ran to him and gave him first aid. I received some extra blows for that.

At five in the morning, they let me go. I was barely able to walk; my legs were all bruised. My village was 20 kilometers away. I caught a taxi and on. Monday I went to the hospital.

Andrei, 30

My wife and I took our child for a walk. And then, when we were passing the Pharaoh bar, the OMON appeared. One of them ran up to me and pulled my kid out of my hands, while the other one beat me with a rifle butt. They took me to the police station, and they let my child and my wife go. Five hours later, I barely made my way home; my legs were all bruised.

Why this *bespredel* in the town? Nobody told us that Blagoveschensk was under martial law! How could the mayor let this happen in the town? Don't we have any rights anymore?

Max E.

The OMON picked me up at the Credo bar on Friday. They beat me up. For three and a half hours, I stood in the same pose by the wall without moving. At 2 a.m. they let me go.

The OMON jokes are idiotic. One of them thought he smelled tobacco smoke in the bus and he goes, "Get out of the bus! The last ten will have to crawl out!" That started a riot: people were running over each other to get out first.

Vitaly, 19

On Saturday at four in the morning, I was coming home from a date and was picked up by the OMON near the Cruise shop. They beat me on the legs and on the neck. I was let go at eight in the morning.

Oskolkov and Tukhvatshin, from Ilyiana Polyana

On Friday we were standing by a house, smoking. All of a sudden, the OMON swooped down on us and took us in. We were taken to Blagoveschensk. They beat us on the legs and buttocks if we moved even slightly. After about five hours they let us go. We had to walk back to the village at five in the morning. We barely made it.

Sergei Yavaev, 17

I was on my way home on Friday at about 9.30 when I was picked up by the OMON just 20 meters from my doorway. They did not beat me too badly, but bad enough, without leaving bruises.

Misha, 11

I was coming home from Computerland at nine in the evening. Suddenly, I ran into the OMON. A masked man with an automatic rifle appeared as if he'd sprung out of the ground. I got very scared. They took me to the police station and hit me a couple of times. While I was there I heard girls screaming, "Stop torturing us, don't beat us."

I was very scared. In three hours they let me go. My mother almost had a heart attack, because she saw me captured and taken away; she thought it was terrorists.

Potapov

At the police quarters, the OMON took my mobile phone, a Samsung D100, and they did not give it back. I haven't even paid for it yet, and it costs 7,400 rubles.

Anna, 47

My son was taken when he stopped his car near a shop. There were three OMON. They dragged him out of the car and took him to a police station. There he was beaten and kicked. When he lost consciousness, they dragged him out, undressed him and poured cold water over him until he came to. Then they called an ambulance and the ambulance took him home. When I saw him, I almost fainted. He couldn't walk. We took him to the hospital immediately. There, the doctor told us to make him rest. But my son is due to be drafted in a week.

I am outraged with these disturbances in town? What is the town administration thinking about? Where are we, Chechnya? The authorities should answer to us, to the mothers. They have proved their helplessness by bringing in OMON from Ufa.⁵ What are we, the taxpayers, paying them for? To bully us and our children?

⁵ Ufa, the capital of Bashkortostan.

Zoya Svetova (Moscow) Jury Duty is Rotten Duty



Russky Kuryer, August 18, 2004

That is what the jurors in the Sutyagin trial will tell you

This article concerns the trial of Igor Sutyagin, a researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies. Mr. Sutyagin was accused of high treason. He is one of a half-dozen scientists, scholars and journalists tried in recent years on charges of committing offenses against the State. These include divulging sensitive information and selling military or double use technology to foreign companies and governments. Many ascribe this trend to the increasingly important role the FSB (formerly the KGB) is playing in today's Russia.

“FROM February 19 to June of 1998, in Birmingham and in London, Igor Sutyagin met with a representative of the U.S. military intelligence, Sean Kidd, and gave his consent to cooperate by collecting information about the Russian Federation and by subsequently transmitting it to a designated person,” says the foreman of jury in a trembling voice. She stammers at every phrase. She is nearly in tears by the time she gets to “guilty... guilty... guilty... does not deserve leniency ...”

This verdict was pronounced by the jury in the case of Russian scientist Igor Sutyagin on April 5, 2004. The twelve jurors unanimously declared Sutyagin guilty of high treason through espionage. The sentence, based on the verdict, with veritable Jesuit hypocrisy, includes:

The court takes into account Sutyagin's positive references from his place of employment and his place of residence and that he has two dependent children, born in 1990 and 1991, as well as his state of health. In the eyes of the jury, he does not deserve leniency. The court sees no circumstances justifying either a lighter or a harsher penalty for Sutyagin and sentences him to 15 years imprisonment.

How did it come to pass that twelve randomly chosen people reached a unanimous decision and in just two weeks decided the fate of an individual? They did what the Kaluga Regional Court was unable to do in 2001, after nearly a year of hearings. Dis-

satisfied with evidential foundation of the case, the court sent it back for additional investigation.¹

To tell the truth, these twelve people have been on my mind a lot for a long time. The desire to understand their decision, to hear their arguments, prompted me to make the acquaintances of a few them. For obvious reasons, the names of the jurors have been changed.

One of twelve

“We were not judges; we were just doing our job. Now that it is over, we shall try to put it out of our minds as soon as possible,” says the director general of a company located in Moscow Oblast. There is the hint of the military in his asceticism and posture. He is more than a little surprised by my interest in the Sutyagin case. “I thought everybody had forgotten about it by now. And you, what makes you so bothered about it?”

Our conversation has more in common with an interrogation. The general director asks more questions than I. What is it, the professional skills of an administrator-negotiator in extracting information from an interlocutor or a desire to outtalk me and, thereby, reduce the risk of saying too much? As juror in a closed trial, he has signed a pledge of non-disclosure. But there is nothing in it to prevent us from talking generally about institutions of court and jury trials, the work of advocates and prosecutors, the role of the judge. I am more interested, of course, in psychological issues. What influenced the decision of the jury? Do they regret it? Do their consciences bother them for having sent a man to prison for 15 years?

My interest is understandable. In my conception, Sutyagin is no kind of spy. Moreover, I know that he never had access to classified information. Even if he compiled analytical reports for a British consulting company, he, first, used open sources for his material. And, second, being a patriot, as he stated repeatedly, he had no intention of causing any harm to Russia.

Figuring that my companion is a smart person and could tell, no less effectively than I, a real spy from a designated one, I try to understand whether he really believes Sutyagin is guilty.

¹ The new Code of Criminal Procedure promulgated on July 1, 2002, limits to preliminary hearings the practice of referring a case back to the prosecution, thus eliminating, one may argue, double jeopardy. Nevertheless, protection against double jeopardy remains weak in Russian law. It was weakened further by a decision of the Constitutional Court of May 11, 2005, granting the prosecution broader rights to seek retrial of an acquitted defendant, virtually allowing it to retry the case until it gets a convictions.

My host explains to me that what makes Sutyagin guilty is precisely his analysis of open sources. By reworking newspaper and magazine articles, he had “converted” their information into classified material that contained state secrets, and, thereby, harmed the State. Such people should be given no pity: “If your daughter had been raped, you would demand reinstatement of the death penalty, wouldn’t you? As to your Sutyagin, the situation is quite simple. He is a smart guy. He wanted to make some money. But it would have been better for him if he had acknowledged his guilt,” the entrepreneur concludes. “As to jury trials, I think our country doesn’t need them. It is an institution, here in Russia as well as in America, of trial by housewives. They can be bought easily.”

“Then why didn’t you refuse to serve on the jury? You had every right to be excused considering how busy you are with your business. Let the housewives try Sutyagin.”

“I couldn’t refuse. This was already my third summons. I had refused twice; that time I put my foot in it.” He signals that our conversation has come to its end.

Jury trials were instituted in Moscow on January 1, 2003, but the Moscow City Court actually began to conduct trials by jury only at the end of the summer of that year. It seemed strange that an entrepreneur from Moscow Oblast would have been called for jury duty three times in the six months since their implementation. The consolidated list of potential jurors is formed in district prefectures by random selection from the lists of registered voters. The Office of the Mayor of Moscow authorizes the list. The secretaries or assistants to judges then call candidates for the jury, choosing them by random drawings or computer-assisted selection from the consolidated list. It looks like even a computer has its favorite names.

We would have acquitted him...

It turns out that Sutyagin’s trial might have had a different conclusion – if the first panel of jurors, chosen in late October, had not been dismissed.

“We would have acquitted him, if we hadn’t been dismissed,” Elena Sergeevna says in a calm, certain voice. She wanted very much to share her experience with someone; therefore, she readily agreed to meet with me.

“Half the panel was for Sutyagin. Why? There was no evidence that he was guilty. They thought we were just pensioners; it would be easy to get us to fall in line. But they were mistaken. It was enough for me to look into his eyes to see that he was not guilty.”

Elena Sergeevna was one of fourteen jurors who began to hear the case on November 3, 2003, in a trial chaired by Judge Pyotr Shtunder. During the first session, the judge

objected to an attempt by the prosecutor to broaden charges against Sutyagin. Sutyagin's lawyers interpreted this as "a small step in the direction of the defense." Then, after several more sessions, someone began postponing the trial.

"First, they called me to say that the session had been moved to another date, and then they told me that I was discharged. We began calling one other and decided that there was something fishy about it. I, personally, feel sympathetic toward Sutyagin. And I don't think I am alone."

Why then was the first jury dismissed? Was it because somebody guessed the mood of the people's judges – they had plenty of opportunities to observe jurors – and decided that this jury would not bring the "intended" verdict?

One judge after another

"Article 242 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation sets forth the principle of permanency of the court's composition. It states that a criminal case should be heard by one and the same judge and panel of jurors," Sutyagin's lawyers note in their appeal to a higher court. "The exception allowed is that a judge in a criminal case may be replaced if he or she is incapable of continuing to participate in court proceedings. A judge who has begun hearing substantive issues of a case is obliged to bring the case to conclusion."

Judge Pyotr Shtunder began hearing the case on November 3, but on November 25 the court resolved to postpone hearings until a medical quarantine was lifted at the Lefortovo investigative prison. As lawyers for Sutyagin point out in their appeal, "Court transcripts show that it was defendant Sutyagin, not Judge Shtunder, who was unable to participate in court proceedings." They point to a document confirming that the decision to change the court panel of jurors was made on November 25, the day following the trial's postponement, although Judge Shtunder had had no compelling reasons to withdraw from the case.

"There is a decision by the chairman of the Moscow City Court dated November 26, 2003, in the case file directing another judge, M.A. Komarova, to take the case," explains Anna Stavitskaya, one of Sutyagin's lawyers. "What is most interesting," Attorney Stavitskaya continues, "is that Judge Shtunder could have continued hearing the case. Instead, for some reason, we waited for Judge Komarova to enter the Sutyagin case three and one-half months later, after a resolution of the chairman of the Moscow City Court."

The Code of Criminal Procedure is silent on whether the old jury must be retained if a new judge enters the case. But since it does not say it may not be kept – it is reason-

able to assume that retaining it is permissible. The defense maintains that the judge was replaced precisely to justify replacement of the jury, with whom the authorities – interested in the criminal slant of the process – were not satisfied.

Non-random “random” selection

In contrast to Shtunder, the case of the Russian scientist was, for Komarova, the judge’s first trial by jury. Lack of experience notwithstanding, she had the advantage of being one of those servants of Themis who specialize in cases “of special importance.” Not surprising that she was given a specially selected panel of jurors. It is nearly child’s play to confirm suspicions that the new candidates for the jury could hardly have been selected by random drawing: simply compare this jury’s composition with the composition of any other jury impaneled in the Moscow City Court. It is also quite possible that the new hearing was delayed to await the Government of Moscow’s confirmation of the 2004 list of potential jurors.

“In the selection of individuals for this jury, the work of a good psychologist can be seen readily,” says Judge L., a judge who spent more than ten years conducting jury trials in a provincial court. “First, there is the composition by gender: Thirty-one candidates are on the list, and only six of them are women. After challenges by the judge and the parties, only three women remained on the panel. Women, as a rule, are more charitable. They come to court more often than men.”

As another rule, pension-aged individuals and representatives of simple occupations predominate on jury panels. They have more free time; they are curious; they willingly accept invitations to participate in court proceedings. Usually pensioners comprise about one-third of those who show up for jury selection. There were eight pensioners on the first jury panel assembled to try Sutyagin, the number is well in accord with the statistics.

But among candidates for the second jury panel, there was only three pensioners. The rest of the candidates must have astounded the imagination of the lawyers, who had to choose twelve jurors and two alternates from heads of large companies, directors of manufacturing plants, businessmen and translators. The coach of a national sports team, the chief physician of a psychiatric clinic and others in positions of responsibility were among the jury candidates.

For comparison, among candidates for the jury in a well-publicized case that came to Moscow City Court a week later, the higher posts were a designer, a realtor and a production manager. In the list of civic-minded people willing to put aside their jobs to fulfill their duty to the State in another trial in the Moscow City Court, I came across a senior engineer, a deputy director and a chief accountant. The rest of the list encompassed pensioners, drivers, unemployed individuals, housewives and stockmen.

The law grants peremptory challenges and challenges for cause to the prosecution, the defense and the court. Jury candidates themselves may ask to be excused, if they feel they cannot take part in court sessions for some reason. After the challenges have been exercised and some candidates excused, the judge appoints the first twelve candidates on the list to the jury panel. Theoretically, it is possible to influence the composition of the panel by moving the preferred candidates to the top of the list.

“It was very difficult to select a panel from these candidates,” Sutyagin’s lawyers recall. “We left the selection process like zombies.” Fearing some deceit, the defense was glad to have managed to removed former FSB employees from the list, or at least those who reported their former employment in the FSB.²

“This is a very strange jury bench,” said Judge M., who has seen dozens of them, as he examines the list of Sutyagin’s jurors and even whistles in surprise. “We don’t see people who are busy with these sorts of positions in our jury pools. They send us their secretaries with letters requesting that they be excused because of their heavy schedules. And they usually are excused.”

The important people here were five heads of companies and enterprises who “randomly” appeared on the jury list for Sutyagin’s trial. Of the fourteen jurors selected, seven dealt with foreigners by virtue of their occupations.

“Two or three people are enough to influence the others,” was the opinion I heard repeatedly from judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys with experience in jury trials.

In America, psychological services advise prosecutors and defense attorneys working in jury trials. For example, a psychologist advised the attorney who was defending Elvis Presley’s doctor to exclude older white women from the panel. A specially conducted poll had shown that this contingent is biased against the accused.

Pro-government types sought

In the Sutyagin case, it had likely been decided that people with “government leanings” should judge him. Or at least those who, depended on goodwill of the State in some way. I came to this conclusion by analyzing what jurors told me in interviews and what I was able to learn about them. “There never were real adversary proceedings,” one of the jurors explained. “The defense attorneys play acted for our benefit, as actors do for the public. The prosecutors were drier and laconic. The defense sometimes went

² Apparently, the author refers to the practice of inserting people with state security or law enforcement background into jury panels to allow the prosecution to appeal an acquittal on the grounds of irregularities discovered later in the composition of the jury.

overboard. Irritation with built by degrees. In any case, they couldn't compete with the prosecution. You could feel the force of the State behind them and that, unquestionably, influenced us, even purely emotionally."

Another important detail: The first jury was told to be prepared for several months, even half a year, in the jury box. Surprising but true, Judge Komarova managed to finish the trial in two weeks. Apparently, the VIPs, the CEOs, the businessmen, the head conductor of a train transporting foreign tourists, the coach training a national team, could not be kept from their jobs for long.

The reader might accuse me of being excessively suspicious or of exaggerating the negative. But besides the unusual composition of the jury, there are other questionable circumstances. For one, the list of potential jurors for the Moscow City Court appears to have become a secret document. Neither Sutyagin's lawyers, nor deputies of the Moscow City Council, have been able to obtain access to it to check whether the members of the second jury had been, indeed, on this list, as they should have been. The list has not been published, which is a violation of the law. Sutyagin's attorneys, reviewed the list of jurors for the Moscow Military District Court, published several months ago by *Vestnik Meriy*. They found one of the jurors in the Sutyagin jury. The lists are compiled separately, and a juror for the Moscow District Court is not allowed to serve on another court's jury, so how could this have happened?

Informal Leaders

"I was the only blue-collar worker there," juror K. acknowledged. Indeed, she looked just like a juror who had been selected via random drawing. "There were important people there." There certainly were.

It is possible that there were informal leaders among the jurors, people whose task it was to convince the doubtful of Sutyagin's guilt. A few jurors whose consciences, it seems to me, were still bothering them, have confirmed these hunches.

Judge Komarova did whatever she could to make the job of the informal leaders easier. The legal classification of the criminal offense of which Sutyagin was accused was purposely omitted from the questions that the jury was obligated to have answered. The jurors were asked to decide whether Sutyagin was guilty of transmitting information to representatives of a foreign military intelligence. (Though it was never proven at the trial that the people whom Sutyagin met represented foreign military intelligence.)

The defense insisted that the judge modify the question to whether "secret information" or "information comprising a state secret" had been transmitted. But Judge Komarova

categorically refused. Her refusal to reword the question corroborates the hypothesis that a unanimous guilty verdict was to have been obtained at all costs. Someone wanted a signal-giving, illustrative process, so that the populace would condemn the spy and the traitor of the motherland in one outburst. It no longer mattered if the jurors were answering, in essence, a question of whether Sutyagin had committed an action not criminal under Russian law. What was important was to have a verdict of guilty.³

“He himself confessed to everything. How could he have transmitted information to foreigners that was dangerous for the State?” Marina, one of the jurors, asks nervously. It is very important to her that I understand why she made that decision. “You think we are enemies, but everyone of us has children. And we live in this country. And Sutyagin wanted to harm it.”

“If this had been a case of murder out of jealousy, there could have been differences of opinion among us. But here everybody felt that we were citizens of one country; we took on the State’s interests almost as if they were our own,” says another juror. This made me want to shout in response: “Look, what kind of people we have. What patriots!” But we know from history that patriotism among our citizens sometimes appears not entirely spontaneously. This brings me to some sorrowful reflection.

Discrediting trial by jury

And here we approach what is foremost: the lesson to be drawn from this dramatic story – for all of its participants and for us. My conclusion from meeting with the jurors proved disappointing. Participation in this judicial process was an anxious, tiring and tortuous experience. A rotten duty. During the entire eleven court sessions, these people never felt themselves to be the “judges of facts” to whom had been entrusted the task of making sense of the nature of the case. It is impossible to shake off the impression that they had been simply used. What is worse, they gave their consent to being used. They had been forced to do their duty. As one of the jurors put it, “it was an unpleasant duty.” This middle-aged man compared his participation in the Sutyagin’s case with serving in the army, and at that in Chechnya. Wouldn’t you agree, such a revelation is worth a great deal to us?

³ The position taken by the defense and the article’s author, that the information has to be secret for the action of transmittal to be a criminal offense under Russian law, is not unassailable. Article 275 of the Penal Code reads: “High treason, that is, espionage, disclosure of State secrets, or any other assistance rendered to a foreign State, a foreign organization or its representatives, conducting hostile activities to the detriment of the external security of the Russian Federation shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term of 12 to 20 years.” Thus any contact with a representative of a foreign organization considered by the Russian government to be conducting hostile activities may be construed as high treason.

Four jurors believed that the accused deserved leniency. Only two voices were missing to have softened the sentence. Does this mean that “random selection” failed? Or was it that among twelve jurors those who leaned toward the government held sway? Neither of those hypotheses gives me comfort. “The Russian court system is happily devouring trial by jury,” said Sergei Pashin, one of the designers of court reform and now a retired judge. I would add, “Not just devouring, but also discrediting.”

The Sutyagin case shows how helpless the defense is in the jury selection process. Selection of candidates for the jury in each particular trial is farmed out to the judge. Nobody knows exactly how it is done. Neither the defense nor the prosecution has the capability to determine how random the random drawings have been. Still, the prosecution, which has the “power of the State” behind it, has an advantage. Should it fail win a guilty verdict, the prosecution can examine the jurors’ biographies and appeal to the Supreme Court to have the verdict overturned based on an undisclosed former conviction or something similar. Advocates don’t have that card to play.

So it happens that among members of a jury assembled to hear a case of treason, in some mysterious fashion, people with a certain backgrounds appear: a graduate of the military academy of the General Staff, a graduate of a secret department of an institute with a military specialty. Today these people are successful businessmen. Under the law, there are no grounds to bar them from participating in cases like Sutyagin’s. But wouldn’t you agree that their selection as jurors for this particular trial raises questions?

The reader might well ask whether something can be done to prevent this situation occurring in the future. There is. We need to change the procedure for jury selection and amend the Code of Criminal Procedure. The selection procedure should be made more transparent and controllable by all parties to the trial. The Sutyagin case must send a signal to the community of judges, defense attorneys and prosecutors. For citizens, any one of whom may one day be summoned as a juror, it should be a signal — to perform a civic duty, and not a rotten duty.

Ekaterina Kolesova (St. Petersburg) The Expired Iodine Tincture



Terra Incognita, № 1, January 2003

The Swiss have a recipe for bringing bureaucracy under control

«...A fat red-faced man
sits behind a desk
and repeats over and over,
'I'm a serious man,
I'm a serious man.'
But, in fact,
he is not a man:
he is a mushroom.»

The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint Exupéry

The more the idea of a powerful state wins over the rulers and the ruled, the more agitated becomes the intelligentsia, once called the rotten strata of society. Then it asks timidly: “Sorry to intrude, but would it be possible at all, meaning no offence, to put, say, a human face on it?”

Our liberal dreams notwithstanding, we kowtow before any official; red-faced, we proffer a bribe to a taxman; we pander slavishly to every whim of a government clerk. In other words, each day we toss yet another shovel of dirt on the grave of our deceased child: the rule-of-law state.

Meanwhile, an unsung hero lives among us. He does not give up without a fight and even fights for all of us. “A powerful state is not one employing innumerable bureaucrats, but one where laws are observed without needing them,” says Karl Eckstein. Mr. Eckstein is called a “fighter against *spravka*,”¹ and he has made it his life’s goal to equalize the rights of the citizen and the State. Is he a utopian? No, just a native of Switzerland; in his first country, citizens have had this equality for a long time.

¹ In this context, *spravka* may be translated as certificate, usually from an official body. An official paper issued to the applicant to confirm certain information about the applicant: marital status, employment, living arrangements, property, health, relatives and dependents, confirmation that utility bills have been paid and other.

A doctor of jurisprudence, a human rights expert, Karl Eckstein came to Russia 19 years ago. Yes, you guessed it, because of Elena; the pair now has two daughters, Sasha and Alina. Eckstein became a Russian citizen and considers himself a Russian patriot. But more than that, he has taken upon himself the task of making Russia a country where the rule of law reigns.

Mr. Eckstein created a public foundation, which he called Constitution (www.konstituzia.ru), to promote citizens' knowledge of basic constitutional rights. He has conducted seminars in law literacy in Cheboksary, Novgorod, Krasnoyarsk, Vladivostok, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Ekaterinburg and Samara. In 1995 he began lecturing without charge at the Moscow Institute of International Relations, titling his course, *The State and the Individual: Mutual Rights and Obligations under the Law*. His law firm, Eckstein and Partners, helps foreign businessmen invest money in Russia. He writes textbooks on human rights for lawyers and high school and college students.

He thinks that Russia's business climate has worsened lately. As to the president's policies aggrandizing the State, Eckstein says: "With the 1993 constitution, had it been implemented, Russia had good chances. We are now getting further and further away from that constitution. Despite Putin's assurances that his administration is fighting bureaucracy, a police state is being built. A police state should not be confused with a rule-of-law state: the latter cannot do without strong policing, but there the police force is used to safeguard the rights of citizens and to uphold law strictly within the framework of the constitution. This is why democracy has been called a dictatorship of law. By contrast, in a police state, law enforcement agencies do what they like; they are not constrained by law or anything else.

"A group of my friends from Sweden were stopped by the Moscow police twice in the course of 15 minutes, as they were leaving a restaurant and as they were entering their hotel nearby. By keeping the police and the court system on a starvation diet, lawmakers do not save money for the state, quite to the contrary. Speaking of traditions like this one, I would say that no other country in the world works so hard to impede its own progress. Russia is full of talented people. Believe me, you will not find so many smart people in the flourishing West. There are more here by an order of magnitude. If only the energies of the Russian people could be used for peaceful purposes! But, so far, the citizens and the State in Russia cheat on each other the best they can.

"I am not saying that all is well in the West. The Swiss are no more honest and no better than the Russians. They have managed, however, to put their bureaucracy on a leash. In Russia there are many, many laws contradicting one another; consequently, there are many holes in them. There is an antidote to this. It lies in a rule-of-law state, where

the basis is not laws themselves but the principles of their application. When one tries to make a law for everything, the holes multiply. This is called technical positivism; it puts everything on a string. It is the root of every dictatorship. This was what led to fascism, which, from a technical or legal point of view is founded on the principle of never trusting anyone.

“What is worse is that these countless laws are inaccessible to people. In a rule-of-law state, each official body has to maintain a website that makes information on itself available. Any citizen can pop into an Internet cafe to look up a law of interest and learn which bureaucrat is responsible for its application and how to find him or her. In Russia, even the White House where the Russian government sits, hides its phone numbers! Sure, it is difficult to achieve legal transparency. But why don’t we start here, in St. Petersburg? Especially, since this is one of a few regions in Russia where lawmaking and executive powers are separated, where a space has been created to realize political opportunities. These opportunities should be used to reduce bureaucracy’s per capita ratio!”

Karl Eckstein has just made this proposal at a workshop organized by the Strategy Foundation. The event attracted St. Petersburg’s brightest. The proposal garnered a range of reactions. Leonid Romankov, the city government’s expert on education and culture and, we hope, the future city ombudsman for human rights, highlighted its innovative character: “So far, we have been fighting arbitrariness, have been trying to regulate everything to a tee by making more laws for the city. All of a sudden, we hear a recommendation to let bureaucrats sail free under the guidance of basic legal principles. Pretty interesting.”

Alexei Liverovskiy, a representative of the St. Petersburg Constitutional Court,² agrees, “The example of driving through a red light when no other cars are there, applied to law, would make our lawmakers dizzy.”

Ilya Barsky who heads Paramita, the Research Institute for Crisis Management and New Technologies, supports Eckstein’s proposal: “After all those revolutions – the revolutions of 1917, 1991 and 1993, the putsch of 2000, when special and intelligence services put their man in power and legitimized his rule – it is time to switch to an evolutionary way of development. This will not be easy considering that state feudalism is a fundamental feature of Russia.”

All agreed with Karl Eckstein that one of the country’s misfortunes is the citizenry’s lack of familiarity with its exemplary constitution. Not only workers and peasants but

² A judicial body chosen by the local legislature. It hears challenges regarding whether the local administration and/or lawmakers have complied with the city’s (or the region’s) constitution or charter.

professors and lawyers do not know their constitutional rights and accept their violations blindly. Even judges from the highest courts have yet to memorize these rights! As a consequence, we have no body of judicial practice to defend constitutional rights. Issues arising from violations of these rights are resolved by bribes or by people going to court with claims based on a concoction of laws – but never having thought of invoking constitutional guarantees.

In fact, many constitutional guarantees are not concrete or clear enough. For example, if an individual, a citizen of Russia, attempts to realize his right to leave the country freely, he might run into difficulties: he will need a passport, which is unobtainable without a residence permit from the police, which is also unobtainable without going through a labyrinth of bureaucratic procedures not based on law.

This is why Karl Eckstein, professor of Law, has proposed his astonishing law “On Principles of the Relationships between State Agencies and a Citizen.” Professor Eckstein wrote the draft bill drawing from laws that function successfully in his native Switzerland. Karl Eckstein recounts that in the West in the 1950s no codified rules guided the state in what it could and could not do. An army of bureaucrats had grown up, and it became necessary to take steps to defend citizens from their arbitrary rule. In the early 1960s, countries in the West began adopting laws on administrative procedures in which constitutional guarantees were adapted to guide interaction between the State and the populace. Since that time, bureaucrats have lost their ability to limit the rights and liberties of the citizenry more than is reasonable and absolutely necessary. This is called the principle of not using a sledgehammer to crack a nut; in other words, the means employed must be proportionate to the ends. The Federal Court of Switzerland has repeatedly stated that this principle embodies one of the basic constitutional rights. Why then, it is not stated in the Swiss constitution? Simple: $2+2=4$ is not in the constitution either, but is true.

Karl Eckstein likes to remind his audiences that article 55 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation declares that the list of constitutional rights is not exhaustive, that it concedes other, universally recognized, rights and freedoms. We should understand, therefore, that European law, which has been evolving for two thousand years, contains many principles so widely accepted and respected that there was no need to spell them out in the constitution. Courts treat these principles on equal footing with those that are delineated in the constitution. The Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation of 1874, for example, did not speak of the inviolability of private property, simply because in that pre-socialist time no one considered necessary to set this sacred truth down in writing. This norm operated as an unwritten principle continuously until 1969, when it was specified in the constitution.

There are many other unwritten principles. Some were developed by the jurists of Ancient Rome and are called sub-principles. One of them says that any law should be interpreted teleologically, that is, based not on the letter but the spirit of the law, on the intentions of the lawmakers, without seeking flaws or loopholes in its wording.

For the convenience of citizens, and to protect them from the State, courts have been divided into those having jurisdiction over quarrels between private individuals and special administrative courts. To the same end, not only lawyers but also all capable citizens are allowed to appear before the court. Challenges to a judge (or an expert or a government official), unlike in Russia, are never heard by the judge who is being challenged.

Incidentally, Mr. Eckstein proposes we relinquish our right to sue a police officer or a government clerk. There is no point in such a suit, he maintains. Courts become bogged down with thousands of petty cases, while convicting a clerk does not change the policies of the department in which he or she works. In Switzerland, after a complaint has been lodged with two higher bodies, the head of a department must answer to the court. This often leads to changes in departmental policies with just one court hearing.

Karl Eckstein enumerated the principles embodied in the draft of the bill he is promoting. He has discussed this bill with prominent jurists and the draft received their approval.

1. The principle of equality. All similar cases are treated equally, that is, an administrative body must make decide similarly in all similar cases. But this should not be taken to an extreme: the court, for example, has ruled that differences in conditions of confinement for convicted prisoners and of those awaiting trial do not violate the equality principle.
2. The principle forbidding mindless application of prescribed procedures. An example: a woman who marries and needs to change her surname on her driver's license is required to submit twelve different *spravka*, including a *spravka* that she is not pregnant.
3. The principle of prohibiting arbitrariness. For example, traffic police may not conduct a campaign of blanket, indiscriminate road checks without first obtaining permission of the court.
4. Prohibition against abuse of law. An example: a policeman conducts a road check and finds nothing out of order. Then the policeman's face lights up. He has found an expired iodine tincture bottle in the car's first aid kit. "You are in violation!"

5. Public interests do not outweigh private interests.

6. Administrative bodies cannot invent norms that do not stem from federal law. For example, the Ministry of Communications of the Russian Federation recently issued a directive permitting special services to listen into telephone conversations and to read electronic communications. The decree was issued in acknowledgement of the special services' statutory purpose – safeguarding the internal security of the country. The court had no choice but to strike down the directive, since a reference to a constant norm cannot justify a sudden assault on citizens' rights.

7. The principle of justified trust. If an administrative body decides to change customary procedure, it must give advanced notice to all concerned. If a citizen feels the change is not justified, he or she may lodge a protest while continuing to follow the old procedure. This is of the greatest importance, because an administrative body enjoys the trust of the citizenry only if its actions are predictable. For example, a violinist is leaving to tour abroad. At customs she is suddenly told: "You may go, but your violin stays. You have permit HCh-23 to take the violin out of the country, but it is history; beginning today, the valid form is HCh-24." Customs officials are wrong; they should have informed everyone concerned through the Ministry of Culture, which issues the permits, of the impending change in permits.

Here is an experience Eckstein had in Russia. "I had been driving the same route for several years. I always made the same right turn. One day a policeman jumped out of the bushes and demanded a fine for a traffic violation. It turned out that the road sign had been changed to prohibit the right turn. In any other country, the driver would be alerted to the change well before coming to the intersection by large signposts, not by a policeman hiding in the bushes."

8. The principle that the larger includes the lesser (*in majore minus*). Citizens should not be required to perform several transactions if a single, all-encompassing one can resolve an issue. For example, a person paid more taxes than he or she actually owed due to a tax inspector's error. The person requests return of the overpaid amount. He is told he must first pay the correct amount, and then he will receive a refund of the original amount. In Europe, a court would rule in favor of the taxpayer: the action performed included the action required.

9. Formalistic approach is prohibited. For example, in an inheritance case, the *spravka* concerning the former place of residence of the deceased is valid for two months and then must be renewed, as if the deceased is expected to rise and resettle.

10. The principle of forwarding to a competent body. Karl says he has learned the Russian expression to kick back the ball. "But instead of returning a complaint to the sender

if it has been sent to a wrong department, it should be forwarded to the body competent to deal with the issue, and the sender should be told to whom it has been forwarded.”

11. The principle of a single window. The government has to decide which of its departments will be responsible for coordinating bureaucratic procedures involving several administrative bodies. When citizen must apply to this department, it will be the department’s responsibility, not the citizen’s, to see that proper procedures are carried out. For example, it will coordinate actions of the Internal Revenue and Welfare departments in response to a citizen’s request. A pensioner in Krasnoyarsk applied to 28 different administrative bodies over the course of three years, and still he was unsuccessful in attempts to privatize his garage.

12. The reply from an administrative body should refer to the specific law applied to the case.

13. The decision in a court case should explain how it may be appealed, where and to what date.

14. The burden to investigate. When a citizen exercises his or her constitutional right, such as the right to have a passport, he should not have to prove that he or she really exists and is entitled to a passport by furnishing the State with the *spravka* issued by the same State bureaucracy. It is not the citizen’s function to carry documents back and forth between various administrative departments; he is not their courier. If one administrative body needs information from another, they should sort it out between themselves and provide the citizen with what he or she is entitled to by law. The only responsibility the citizen has is to provide the information required, not prove its veracity. If it turns to be false, he or she may be criminally liable. In Switzerland, it takes about ten minutes to exchange a passport, and it can be done by mail. If a government clerk has doubts, then he makes the inquires, checks databases and so on. The right of the citizen to have a passport should not depend on whether he can get a *spravka* from Magadan that he was married there and a *spravka* from Tajikistan that he was born there.

The procedure should be the same as in a criminal procedure: the investigator does not order the suspect to bring a *spravka* confirming how much he has stolen. He understands that it is his burden to investigate, to find out the circumstances of the case, to decide whether to believe the suspect, to search for documents or for witnesses. Retiring weavers at a provincial, state-owned textile plant in Russia recently went on a hunger strike. Ten years prior to the hunger strike, all files kept at the plant were lost in a fire. The poor women who worked there cannot prove their right to a pension. Certainly, not those women, but the government should be working to restore the files or, failing to restore them, collect evidence and testimony to establish the truth. If the court can

convict a criminal based on evidence and testimony, why shouldn't that be enough to restore the rights of pensioners?

"Where to begin?" asks Karl Eckstein. "Russia's citizens should become cognizant of their rights and learn how to react properly, and not with hunger strikes, to violations of those rights. That is why we created our foundation. Through joint effort, we can fight deep-rooted customs of administrative departments inventing their own procedures and rules, adding endlessly to the lists of required *spravka*. This is a great evil. Each new rule is usually kept secret; it often can be learned only after a day of waiting in line, which ends with a clerk barking something barely intelligible at you.

"The system has been purposely devised so that only a person who knows the bureaucratic jungle intricately can collect the papers required within prescribed periods. As a result, a proliferation of intermediaries has arisen to sell their help in maneuvering through bureaucratic intricacies. The intention is quite clear – to create sufficient obstacles to make applicants offer bribes.

"Unnecessary *spravka* breed and feed corruption. The worst of it is that citizens and the State have become so accustomed to this perverted system that they cannot see it in its true light: what is customary becomes no longer a crime. But there can be no prosperity where bureaucratic arbitrariness rules. The flow of capital has become a flight of capital. My uncle, a successful businessman, came to Russia thinking he might open a business here. As required, he left his passport at the hotel's reception. On the street, we were stopped by a police and asked to show our papers. Then they took us to the precinct office and demanded \$200, but somehow let us go after we gave them \$20. After this experience, do you think my uncle still wants to do business in Russia?

"Vladimir Putin often says that small- and medium-sized businesses are the mainstay of the economy. Why then hasn't he done something to stop bureaucratic arbitrariness from strangling them? Large companies can live with it. They can afford to maintain a staff of experts in friendship with tax inspectors and fire inspectors and public hygiene inspectors, while small businesses spend all their time fighting them, leaving little time for doing business. If the bill we propose, or one similar, passes the State Duma – and many deputies support it: Pokhmelkin, Grebennikov, Romanchuk, Semyonov and others – bureaucrats who are in government solely for bribe taking will leave. They are not accustomed to doing their job. Those who stay can be paid more and more can be demanded of them for their pay.

"The bureaucratic apparatus has grown in size by 90% over the last few years. This is a burden for the citizenry and the State. I am sure many bureaucrats can be made to leave on their own accord. This is how we will get rid of them and of their arbitrary rule."

IN TRANSITION TO A MARKET ECONOMY

Nadezhda Popova (Moscow) **Vekselberg's Nine Eggs**



Kompromat, January 27, 2005

The third richest man in Russia is battling sick children in court

ONE of the richest men in Russia, Victor Vekselberg, has purchased nine Faberge eggs in the West and brought them back to his native land. This patriotic deed, though not yet fully appreciated by the country, assures him a spot in Russian history. That is not Victor Vekselberg's only claim to fame, however. He was sued by Dmitry Kuzin, a sick 18-year-old boy from Nadvoitsa – Kuzin won the suit.

In Dmitry Kuzin's home town, the village of Nadvoitsa in the Republic of Karelia, no one has heard of the Faberge eggs or of their creator, goldsmith Carl Faberge. Yet the villagers have no difficulty pronouncing the difficult name Vekselberg, although some shorten it to Veksel. Sometimes, they call him lord. The townspeople know Vekselberg as the man who appropriated their aluminum plant. They know Vekselberg's company, SUAL: the Siberia-Urals Aluminum company took over their town. Lord has another twenty-odd aluminum plants like the one in Nadvoitsa, but none whose actions have evoked outrage comparable to the indignation.

Dmitry Kuzin looks a small, dried up old man with a mouth disfigured by fluorosis. Dmitry is not the only one in the town suffering from fluorosis. Indeed, the children's favorite pass time here is scaring each other with their bleeding gums and the blackened remains of their teeth. Dmitry is the only one, so far, who has won compensation in the courts: 50,000 rubles (*about \$1,800*). Doctors promise this sum is enough to stop the rotting in his mouth and to make him dentures.

Following Dmitry's example, other Nadvoitsa residents have begun filing court suits. Now there are 15,000 of them in Nadvoitsa. The claims could bankrupt the plant. There have been death threats against Dmitry Kuzin.

Pale Abraham, mustached and holding a rapier

Victor Vekselberg became known to the public in 2002, not so very long ago, when he brought his bank, Pervyi Gorodskoi Bank, to bankruptcy and left his clients holding the bag – \$40 million went missing. The money that belonged to depositors had been siphoned off through offshore accounts to Alba Alliance Bank, also owned by Vekselberg.

Vekselberg's friend, Alfred Kokh,¹ has published a long interview with him in which he questioned Vekselberg about the meaning of life, about Vekselberg's business, hobbies, favorite countries and other matters. This is how Kokh introduces his friend: "I have known him for ten years. In this day and age, that is quite some time. There have been a few occasions when we have helped each other a lot, which made us friends.

"Outwardly, he resembles Abraham, the Bible's patriarch or Isaac or Jacob: gray haired and bearded, the black eyelashes accentuating lively eyes set in a pale face. With his eyes always squinted and a mouth hidden in a mustache, it is difficult to tell whether he is laughing or crying. Talking to him keeps you on your toes; it is even more difficult and to follow his train of thought." ("Non-Biblical Patriarch" by Alfred Kokh, *Medved*)

Clients who searched Moscow so long for the fellow who had victimized them and whose thoughts were so difficult to follow found that Vekselberg was good at blending into the crowd. Not until Russian papers published the news that Vekselberg, executive vice-president of TNK-BP, had bought the nine Faberge eggs in the United States for \$100 million, did they file suit with the Moscow Zamoskvoretsky District Court to detain the Faberge art work. Then they appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office for help finding their missing millions. Inquiries were sent to Swiss authorities and prosecutors. Case № 239 has been opened, and the Moscow Directorate of the FSB² has taken interest in it.

The oligarch was, apparently, unperturbed by these occurrences. While his former clients were busy writing appeals to the prosecutors of Russia and Switzerland, Vekselberg took his eggs on a tour of Russia to demonstrate his collection to a more enlightened and appreciative audience than the depositors of the Pervyi Gorodskoi Bank. (Vekselberg kept some of his millions in Credit Suisse and some in UBS.) After exhibiting the eggs in the Kremlin, Vekselberg took them on tours to St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. Local newspapers carried such headlines as "Vekselberg Returns Eggs to Russia."

To date, the \$40 million is still missing. Andrea Sadeki, press secretary in the Swiss Federal Prosecutor's Office, declines to reveal the names of the initiative group of Pervyi Gorodskoi Bank depositors and would not say whether her office has received documents from the FSB or the Russian Prosecutor General's Office. She did comment

¹ Alfred Kokh, businessman and public servant. As vice-chairman and later chairman of the State Committee for the Management of State Property (1993 to 1997), Kokh was involved in privatizing Russia's industrial assets. He has been accused of abusing his office for private gain. Among questionable dealings was an extremely large honorarium for his book *The Selling of the Soviet Empire* (available in English). He represents Leningrad Oblast in the Federation Council, the upper house of parliament.

² Federal Security Service.

that the Swiss Federal Prosecutor's Office investigates individuals not banks. Does this mean that Vekselberg will keep his nine eggs and the depositors will never see their money?

"In real life, he is an easygoing and mellow person, though his first answer to anybody is no," Kokh continues. "It's sort of his conditional reflex." He puts his next question to Vekselberg: "In the course of business you have had to compete, to ruin some people financially, to squeeze them out of the market, to cause them to lose their fortunes and businesses. Perhaps you make people pay too high a prize in order to indulge yourself?"

Vekselberg answers: "Some of it is sport. I like having worthy opponents very much. For me it is irresistible..."

Kokh eggs him on: "You mean like fencing, only with the gloves off. And each strike with the foil draws blood ..."

An aluminum magnate and an oil king

The business newspaper *Vedomosti* has its own opinion as to why Vekselberg bought the eggs: "Vekselberg became known all over the country for buying a collection of Faberge Easter eggs from the Forbes family for \$100 million. It was not philanthropy; it matters to him what the West thinks of Russians, because most of his business is closely tied to foreign partners."

Indeed, Victor Vekselberg has interests in several businesses, as a co-owner and a manager. They include TNK-BP, an international oil company, and the aluminum company SUAL, the one that is poisoning children in Nadvoitsa. Vekselberg started his business career in not-so-remote 1991, when he co-founded the company Renova. In 1996 he co-founded SUAL, which initially united the Irkutsk and the Urals aluminum plants. In 1998 he was appointed vice-chairman of the board and first vice-president of TNK. In July 2001 he was promoted to the post of director for strategic planning and corporate development. In 2002 he became chairman of the board of TNK. Today the proud owner of the nine Faberge eggs chairs the board of directors of Renova Group and sits on the boards of directors of the companies that Renova owns: RUSIA Petroleum, SIDANCO and ONAKO. Immediately after SUAL Holding was formed in 2000, Vekselberg became its president.

Lately aluminum has been lessening its grip on Vekselberg's imagination, for which, perhaps, the Nadvoitsa residents are at fault. They have all but attacked the aluminum plant's managers with pitchforks. Vekselberg is aware of this. Mutiny on his ship is the

last thing he needs, especially since international environmental organizations have already begun pursuing the environmental situation at the Nadvoitsa aluminum plant. In Nadvoitsa 95% of children suffer from fluorosis, a condition that leads to softening of bone tissue. The children's milk teeth start to rot before they are replaced by permanent teeth.

Russian and British environmentalists recently held a conference in Nizhny Novgorod on stable organic pollutants. Those in attendance decided that they would use the London Nonferrous Metals Exchange to inform purchasers of aluminum produced in Nadvoitsa the cost at which it is being produced.

For the information of our readers, the Nadvoitsa aluminum plant has capacity to produce 67,000 tons of aluminum per year. The plant employs roughly 2,000 people. SUAL Holding controls 60% of the shares, and the remaining shares belong to Russian Aluminum (RusAl).

This is quite something to run from. Vekselberg has stated publicly that he intends to switch exclusively to oil projects.

Vekselberg's golden list

Presently Vekselberg is working – systematically and methodically – on a project to exploit oil deposits in Eastern Siberia. The program to develop the Verkhnechonsk oil field is ready; an application has been made for an oil exploration license in the East Sugdinsk territory. A pipeline will be built to the Far East port of Nakhodka to transport the oil. More is coming: discovered and potential oil deposits on the border between Irkutsk Oblast and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the north shores of Lake Baikal.

Vekselberg and BP have put their best hopes in Samotlor. Indeed, this area in Russia has more oil deposits than one can count without missing a few. With the help of hi-tech seismic equipment that show geological structures in 3-D, Vekselberg is looking for new oil at Samotlor's existing fields. Heretofore, this expensive geological survey method was used only to map new deposits.

Vekselberg does not like answering questions journalists pose as to whether he has problems with the government. As it turns out, the authorities have threatened for some time to cancel the production licenses he holds for a large gas production project in Eastern Siberia, the very project that caused BP to invest in TNK-BP. British Petroleum representatives and Vekselberg himself “remain optimistic as to the prospects of the project.”

Notwithstanding rising oil production rates and lobbying by potential customers in Asia and America, Vekselberg knows that the Kremlin is reluctant to approve more pipelines to transport oil to foreign markets. Experts believe that the government's traditionally cautious estimates of reserves are what is driving its go-slow policy. "Russia can produce more oil from existing oil fields than was previously thought," says Francois Cattier, an analyst with the International Energy Agency (France). "We believe this tendency will continue."

Today thousands of oil wells remain out of operation. Oil workers are busy cleaning up oil spills, some of which occurred more than ten years ago. But Vekselberg has already put Samotlor on his golden list. Samotlor was discovered in 1969, but it has produced only 17 billion barrels of oil so far. Experts say that is only one-fourth of what can be produced at the field. Mr. Vekselberg knows this too.

Because quite some time has passed since Samotlor's oil stopped gushing from its wells, water has to be pumped in to bring the remaining oil out. Because Russian-produced pumps lack sufficient productivity, foreign-made electrical pumps have been brought in and are pumping water day and night. In 2003 TNK-BP spent one million dollars to modernize the pumps, increasing oil production by about 2.2 million barrels a year, a three-fold increase compared with the previous year.

The company has introduced a new method of unlocking underground formations. The results so far exceed all expectations: well № 5689, which had long been dry, began gushing oil.

Where does this all lead? Victor Vekselberg, a successful businessman and a co-owner of international oil company TNK-BP, is 143rd in the list of the world's richest people. His worth is estimated at \$5.9 billion. Vekselberg says that he likes an element of sport in his business. Perhaps, for the mustached Abraham, weighing in at number 143 is not the limit.

The cost of aluminum

Let us return to Karelia, to the long suffering town of Nadvoitsa.

The realities of life there are such that Dmitry Kuzin must carry a pneumatic pistol when going out. Dmitry and his relatives have been receiving threats and demands to withdraw his suit for compensation. Who threatens them? "Nadvoitsa criminals," says Dmitry. "The aluminum plant will appeal the court's decision on compensation for my ruined health. We don't know what will happen to the suit."

Besides Dmitry, there are four children in the Kuzin family. While Dmitry only suffers from fluorosis of teeth and bones, his older brother has a tumor sitting on his carotid artery. Other children are sick too. Dmitry's father hanged himself several years ago, leaving a note, "Struggle on without me. I am tired. I am leaving." Dmitry's father was also suing the plant.

Andrei Kozlovich, president of the children and youth foundation Ariston in the town of Segezha in Karelia, describes the environmental conditions in Nadvoitsa: "In addition to compounds containing fluorine in the water, the carcinogen benzopyrene has been found in the air. In the residential area of Nadvoitsa, its concentration is 77 times above the maximum permissible level. There are places in the town where it is still higher, exceeding permissible concentrations by a factor of 240. Women in Nadvoitsa suffer rates of miscarriages that are three times higher than the national average. They give birth to stillborn children four times more often, and the percent of children with birth defects is 16.8 times higher than average. Nadvoitsa's aluminum kills people. The plant dumps fluorine-containing industrial waste into a nearby swamp. From there, the waste seeps into the drinking water supply. Neither reporters nor environmentalists are allowed into the plant.

"The facility has plenty to hide from television cameras. Nowadays the aluminum plant dumps waste illegally in other places around Nadvoitsa: one of the dumping grounds is located near Uzkaya Salma Lake. We are trying to fight water pollution, but we encounter such brutal resistance on the part of plant management that we have to think of how to defend ourselves. It is true that Dmitry Kuzin does not leave home without his pneumatic pistol. He was beaten badly after he won his case in the court."

Does Vekselberg know all this? Or is he just interested in catalogs of rare jeweled-art objects and gold spouting oil fields?

Meanwhile, life in Nadvoitsa goes on and women give birth to some children. Children without teeth, children without fingers, mentally retarded children and children with Down syndrome. The average pay at the plant is 5,000 rubles (*about \$180*) a month.

This is how they pay for Nadvoitsa aluminum.

Vladimir Nesyaev (Shushensky District) **A Tractor's Arrest in the Field**



Krasnoyarsky Rabochy, April 29, 2004

A TRACTOR was at work in a field. Admittedly, it was not brand new, but it had just been overhauled at the Niva machine shop, the one in Shushensky District's Kazantsevo village. This was the tractor's first run since leaving the shop. It needed to be taken in a hurry; soon there would be plowing to do and then planting. Still, Ivan Sadakov was mistaken in thinking that the tractor was the property of the agricultural enterprise that he headed, even though they had just paid more than a few thousand rubles for its repairs. The tractor was no longer theirs, and the court marshals explained that to Ivan Sadakov. They came accompanied by the police, stopped the tractor at the field's edge and arrested it.

Just a few days later, the model MTZ-80 tractor, manufactured by the Minsk Tractor Plant, was sold along with a seeder that had been confiscated at the same time, together with a plow and a mower. The entire lot went for 10,000 rubles (*about \$300*). This is less than if the machinery been sold for scrap. The combined power rake-hay turner went for 6,500 rubles. The fully equipped timber truck that Sadakov had intended to lease – the proceeds were to have gone toward the purchase of seed and fuel – was sold for 55,000 rubles; the Volga sedan went for 72,000 rubles. You don't have to be an expert to realize that these are not just fire-sale prices, they are laughable. The timber truck alone could have been pushed in a twinkling to at least 200,000 rubles.

What is owed should be paid up; no one will argue about that. But the agricultural produces in Shushensky District are all in debt. Average debt is a million and a half rubles. The debts have accumulated through years of mismanagement, irresponsibility and plain theft committed by former managers. Now their successors have been left to deal with the consequences. For the local producers, what is hardest to bear is that their vehicles and agricultural machinery are being arrested as the planting season approaches, at the very moment when they cannot do without them.

Formally, the court marshals cannot be blamed. They have no right to transfer the arrested property to anyone, and they did not. It is the Russian Federal Property Fund that is charged with handling this property. It has a representative in the district, a municipally owned company called the Trading House, to whom it has delegated its obligations – and this is how the Trading House carries out its charge.

Two MTZ brand tractors, in running condition, were driven all the way from Kazantsevo village to Shuskenskoe and sold for 16,500 rubles (*about \$600*). In Subbotino village, the marshals arrested every movable piece of machinery farmers had, all nine units. A fully operable loader, a modification of the tractor model DT-75 and a UAZ four-wheel-drive truck were sold for 35,000 rubles. The director of the Subbotino agricultural enterprise begged Arkady Paka, who heads the Trading House, to give him time before the sale, promising he would find money to buy back the machinery. He did find the money, almost the next day. But when he returned to Shushenskoe, he learned that the machinery had already been sold.

Once again, formally, the Trading House cannot be accused of violating its charge. Russian law does not require the trader to put forfeited real estate up for auction or take movable property as consignment and put it up for public sale. The trader may just as validly sell it to any client he wishes based on a purchase and sales agreement. The purchase and sales route is exactly what they follow, with no thought to the market price of the goods. It is the ruination of agricultural producers.

If the trader were doing it differently, agricultural producers would be in considerably better financial positions. Instead of selling, say, 20 units of machinery for peanuts, the trader could sell five for their fair market value, and that would allow the producer to extinguish his entire debt. Alternatively, the trader might sell those 20 units but add a commission to the price. He would keep part of the commission as his earnings from the deal and give part to the impoverished producer. This would help the agricultural producer face the planting season.

The Trading House, however, almost never handles its business in ways that would benefit the producer and the Trading House itself. This is the case even though the trader is always in the red. Why then has the administration of Shushensky District given the green light to establishing this firm under its auspices and allowed it to act in its interests? Certainly it does little to further the interests of the Shushensky District's agricultural producers. For them, the coming season promises to be a difficult one as it is, without further complications.

Vladimir Nesyaev (Shushensky District) The Toy Trucks



Krasnoyarsky Rabochoy, July 15, 2004

IN the April 29 issue, in the article “A Tractor Arrested in the Field,” we wrote about local court marshals confiscating property of agricultural producers in Shushensky District in lieu of the debts these farmers owe. We wrote about the fearless and profitable (for whom we wonder) methods employed by the local municipal outfit, the Trading House, which acts as attorney-in-fact to dispose of confiscated property for the Federal Property Fund of the Russian Federation.

If some readers have viewed what we have described as a comedy of morals, most will find the story that began on June 15 in the central town of Shushensky District nothing short of a tragic farce. Many will label it *bespredel*.¹

Nikolai Panasenko is the director of the auto service and transportation company Shushenskoe. Despite the passage of time, Panasenko hasn’t recovered from the experience; he speaks agitatedly and in an angry voice: “One day the court marshal and a representative of the Trading House, Ponedelnik was his name, visited our company office. Straight off, even before they stepped inside the door they said, ‘We are taking your vehicles in lieu of your debts. And they have been sold already, anyway.’ At the same time, as if to confirm their words, other men in their company began waving cash receipts in our faces.”

Those were the only papers they had or, at least, the only ones they showed Panasenko: no inventory of the property they were attaching, no paperwork allowing them to take custody of the seized items. Nothing!

“Imagine,” says Panasenko, “what would happen if people in uniform came to your apartment and told you we have already sold your television set and the furniture too. The company is in debt; I won’t deny it. A marshal visited us once before to attach our real estate property, but there was never any talk of confiscating out vehicles. We are far from bankruptcy. But in one day, ten people lost their jobs. Now the company is as good as dead.”

Panasenko tried to prevent the unlawful confiscation of his company’s property, but the representatives of law and order and the municipal businessman broke the locks

¹ A recent addition to Russian, literally a situation or behavior without limits, meaning, among other things, utter lawlessness and arbitrariness.

on his garage and drove away with three KamAZ² trailer trucks and their trailers and a Moskvich sedan. The “law enforcers” tracked down the fourth KamAZ, a fuel truck, in Kuraginsky district. It was making a fuel delivery. They followed the truck to its fuel discharge destination, let the driver empty the tank and then just pushed him out of the cabin, reportedly handcuffing him for good measure.

As for Panasenko, he is holding a summons from the justice of peace. He must answer to charges of interfering with the king’s men while they were carrying out their official duties, an administrative violation. By interfering, they mean that he was shouting and swearing; for that, he faces a fine of up to ten minimum monthly wages.³

The order to distrain came by mail a week after the vehicles had been seized. It is a peculiar document, dated May 20, 2004. The first page is a form page; the following are made up of ordinary writing paper filled with hurried handwriting. The official property appraisal list bears a June date; it is the most interesting. The four trailer trucks are assessed at 21,000 rubles, 23,000 rubles, 24,000 rubles and 26,000 rubles. The trailers are simply dirt cheap: 13,000 rubles, 12,000 rubles and 9,000 rubles.

Reading the list, it is easy to conclude that the appraisers were valuing toy trucks, not real ones. Any transportation specialist will tell you that the real market price for a powerful trailer truck in good conditions – one that is put on the road each day – is more than 100,000 rubles. Trailers go for half as much. Incidentally, the marshals managed to sell the Moskvich sedan, which was assessed at 10,000, through the Trading House for an astonishing 1,500 (*about \$50*). They claimed in the distrain order that the car was missing its engine.

“That is a bloody lie,” Panasenko protests, “we were driving the car till the day it was seized.”

According to a court decision, Panasenko’s company also owed money to the Federal Pension Fund. Though not much, just some 115,000 rubles. A single KamAZ truck could have covered it easily. But even that would not have been necessary, since they had already attached the one-hundred-car garage. The garage alone would have sufficed, had it not been assessed at a miserly 90,000 rubles.

Director Panasenko had found many willing to pay much more to purchase the garage, but the uniformed powers told him not to meddle. It was their job to find the buyer.

² Produced by the Kama Automotive Plant in Tatarstan.

³ Currently in Russia fines are often measured in the minimum monthly wage decreed by the government.

Not long before the KamAZ seizure incident, one of them told Nikolai Panasenکو, “Sell me this car; I want it for my son.”

“If I sell it, what then will I have to run the business?” As it turned out, this was an ill-advised answer. He refused to sell one car and lost his whole fleet in pretty short order.

The Shushenskoe auto service and transportation company is, of course, heavily in debt, but it is not bankrupt. It falls into the category of agricultural enterprises, because it serves the agricultural sector by transporting fuel, seeds and other items essential for production. Therefore, it is protected by law and, by law, entitled to debt restructuring. But guess what happened when Panasenکو obtained papers to this effect from the tax authorities and showed them to the marshals? Right. They told him to do you know what with the papers.

The transportation company is certain the seizure was a made-to-order seizure. Somebody needed trucks cheap and in a hurry. One cannot help but wonder about the role and function of the representative of the regional division of the Federal Property Fund. Not once in recent memory has the municipally owned Trading House sold property at a sum higher than the assessment price. From March to May, the properties seized in the districts of Kurganinsky, Ermakovsky and Idrinsky were sold for a total of 26,000 rubles, below the properties’ assessed prices. How does the company staff make a living if they work so arduously to sell at a loss?

And what is completely incomprehensible: why have the local authorities shut their eyes to the situation? In the last three to four years, sizable chunks of property from formerly flourishing agricultural enterprises in the villages of Subbotino and Kapyrevo have been sold for a pittance; the granary in Siny Kamen was shut down. The agricultural sector in Shushensky District, formerly one of the best in the Krasnoyarsk Krai, has fallen into a deep, prolonged crisis. Hundreds of workers have lost their jobs.

Of all the food-processing plants in the district, the only one that has increased its production volume is a distillery, Shushensky Brand. Soon it may be the enterprise that epitomizes the district. Meanwhile, municipal officials are obsessed with the idea of making Shushenskoe a major tourist attraction.⁴ They organize conferences; they sing and dance and try to impress the rare visitor with what remains of deteriorating infrastructure built in Soviet times, in a period of stagnation. But for years they have been unable to repair the main building of the central district hospital.

⁴ Shushenskoe, in Eastern Siberia, 500 miles south of the city of Krasnoyarsk. Shushenskoe was once possibly the best-known village in all Siberia. Every Soviet citizen was supposed to know that Vladimir Lenin spent three years in the 1890s in exile there. Boasts an open-air museum and a historic village, created in 1970.

JOURNALISM AS AN ACT OF CONSCIENCE

**A Collection of Articles by Winners and Finalists of the
Andrei Sakharov Award, Journalism as an Act of Conscience
2001-2005**

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Подготовка к печати и печать – ОАО «Кострома».

Подписано в печать 28.04.2007 г. Формат 60×84/16.
Бумага офсетная. Печать офсетная. Гарнитура Newton.
Усл. печ. л. 15. Тираж 2000 экз. Заказ №