

## VIKTOR SHENDEROVICH

### SEMINAR, DAVIS CENTER FOR RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN STUDIES

*Transcribed and translated by Oleg Bibergan. Comments of the transcriber are italicized.*

*PRESENTER:*

...Shenderovich is also the author of such books as “Shendevry,” “1000 Aphorisms,” and “It’s raining in Gadykino.” What’s interesting, and as they say in Russian “not accidental,” is that all of the TV shows Mr. Shenderovich was taking part in (both on NTV and on TV6) were closed down rather quickly, even though they were some of the most popular programs. Right now his shows are aired only at the Radio Freedom and at the Echo of Moscow radio stations (as well as on the internet).

However, for Mr. Shenderovich, the official “rating” is a criterion of a special sort: as he said, Mr. Ceausescu had an excellent rating two weeks before he was executed. He said that Mr. Putin should be afraid of his huge rating, since the rating of 80% (*incomprehensible*) is a rating of fear. Viktor Shenderovich, rather, is interested in the “okhrabrenie” (*getting progressively braver*) of society, and, currently, from what I know, he takes part in politics and is a co-founder of the Committee-2008 (he will tell you a bit about that). He also hosts the show with a wonderful name “Everybody’s free to go,” a specifically Russian negative perception of the word “freedom,” which was induced by the meetings during which everyone would vote anonymously and then everybody would be free to go. Well, since our meeting is just started, no one is free to go yet, and now let’s greet Viktor Shenderovich!

*SHENDEROVICH:*

First, a small correction: I do not participate in the politics. Committee-2008, the co-founder of which I am, is simply a civic activity. Of course we intervene with the field of politics, and we give our judgments regarding political activities and events...(*incomprehensible*) The members of our committee are independent, successful in their vocations people who have already self-actualized, and who do not need to fight for an office or a budget (that favorite Russian activity). We are a civic, public organization. Actually, after what was told we should get to agreement in order not to ruin the impression (*laughter*).

First of all, I would like to say that everything happened pretty accidentally. I will be talking about myself, but at the same time there will be allusions and references to different Russian topics. In the summer of 1994, Grigoriy Gorin called me up and said that there was an idea to make an analogue of French show “The Puppets”... (*incomprehensible*) he was offered a contract to do that, and he asked me to be his “apprentice.” When we started to think out the script, and when some sort of a concept was formed in my brain, the idea was to create this nonexistent Russian town, a town in

which all events would be “scaled down” to the size of this town, but still reflect whatever happened in Russia at the time. In other words, there would be a mayor, the head of militia, some sort of an elderly communist, some sort of a young democrat, all of which would have recognizable similarity (*probably, with the famous politicians*), but still, everything would go on in this small provincial town. This idea was not realized, but Gorin said “you made it up, so you should be doing it,” and, this way, I became the author of the show.

It was amusing, because the producers of the show did not envision satire as part of the show—when the first puppets were made, there was no doll of Yeltsin, no doll of Chernomyrdin, there were puppets of either secondary politicians or politicians who were out of play by that time (and thus, were not dangerous). Hence, the first couple of months were spent first on the “ulamyvanie” (*slang for persuading*) of producer and then on the “OK” to make a doll of Yeltsin. We were trying to explain to him that the show could not be satiric without the doll of the president. During this time, I started to formulate for myself the rules of satire, which I had never done before since I never did this sort of a name-based, personal satire. Satire can be very different, and in this way it is different from any sort of mocking. When the satire does not contain love (*incomprehensible*), if there is no passion, if there only is mocking, then that is not a satire. First, you cannot make fun of the weak—this is the first commandment. Ethically speaking, satire is a very clean genre. Attempts to make fun of the weak are, for some reason, not funny. At least, it is impossible in Russian tradition. Also, it is absolutely impossible not to make fun of the powerful.

So, few months we were persuading producer, and then, once he crossed himself (I don’t know which way, because he’s French), he ordered to make the doll of Yeltsin. Then, it became even funnier, because, starting December 1994, the Puppets had Yeltsin, Chernomyrdin, but not Korzhakov, then the guard, the Main Guard. Actually, he was the most powerful person in the country, and he was deciding whom to give access to Yeltsin’s body, and whom not to. People were not scared of Yeltsin or Chernomyrdin nearly as much as they were scared by Korzhakov. Korzhakov was really scary. And, for future historians, I think it will be a very interesting fact to know that for a few months the satire show is being aired, and there is the President, the Prime-Minister, but not the Major Guard, because everyone is so scared of him. Moreover, the first episode of the Puppets in which Korzhakov actually appeared was banned from the air for two months. The episode was called “Don Kihot,” it was impossible to ignore the bodyguard whose name was “Sancho,” Korzhakov Alexander Ivanovich. I mean, there were so many similarities that it was impossible to ignore them, so we thought out this episode, there was this Sancho, then the episode lied down (*...on the shelf—an idiom for “banned”*), and it was not aired for two months. The channel afforded itself to put the episode on only when Clinton arrived with the official visit. If we had to perish, at least we decided to perish in front of the eyes of international community. So, this episode was finally aired. Of course, this ratio of fears was there... Right now I am remembering these chunks of history through the history of the puppets, because in order to study modern history, once again, I think it is important to learn what was funny during the time, what was taboo during that time, etc.

Then there was a great story of how everyone was afraid of Chernomyrdin. The first attempt of censuring the show was actually related to Chernomyrdin (I wrote about that). He went to the United Arab Emirates, to the military exposition, and the scene about this in the Puppets was supposed to be started with the following verse:

Once in country from Dubai  
Has arrived the krasnobai

*(krasnobai is Russian for filibuster)*

Nothing special. So, one evening (as the actors get together after their plays), we get the fax from the top of the TV station saying that “the krasnobai” must be replaced. It’s hard to believe today that someone could be afraid of Chernomyrdin. Chernomyrdin, this lovely linguist (*laughter*). Yes, people were afraid of him. This is a historical fact – in April 1995, people were afraid of Chernomyrdin; Chernomyrdin was expected to become the next president of Russia; he was quickly gaining power, and there was this fear.

The story resolved in a very amusing way: since the episode’s script was written exclusively in the poetic form, and the word “Dubai” could not be replaced, because it was already alluded to in other parts of the poem, and without it, it would be unclear what happens next. Hence, we had to find a rhyme for the word “Dubai” so that “the krasnobai” could be removed:

Once in country from Dubai  
Has arrived...(*laughter*)

I did not participate in this search, since I already went through this on the stage of thinking out the script, so I knew that krasnobai is the softest euphemism there is in Russian language... Then, I tried to deceive the fate and move Dubai away from rhyme:

From Dubai once upon a time  
Has arrived the...\* (*very loud laughter*)

*\*the joke here is based on the implied obscene rhyming to the phrase “kak-to raz”/“once upon a time”*

We tortured ourselves for two hours, nothing was made up, but then somebody got a brilliant idea to send the fax to the authorities of the channel which said that we would accept any rhyme to the word “Dubai” that they would offer us. The authorities went through the same cycle of searching (*laughter*), and then we got the fax saying “fine, the krasnobai stays” (*laughter*).

Once I began working as a political satirist, I (personally) started to find out many new things about my own country and its political history, since I never really got close to this field, all my life I hated to read newspapers and get into all these discourses and

altercations about “Who? With whom? And how?” and, of course, I was astounded: of course even before that I did realize that there (*in the offices*) were no Spinozas, but, certainly, the level was completely astonishing. The next episode after the krasnobai was called “The East is a delicate business,” it was a paraphrase of the “White Sun of the Desert,” it was during the time of the First Chechen War. In this episode, the brave soldier Borish Nikolaevich Sukhov (*laughter*) was saving the harem of Northern-Caucasus republics. That’s exactly how they were called: Osetiya, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, Ichkeriya... And, obviously, the bad guy’s name was Johar. So, the episode was aired, and the following Monday I got a phone call from Sergey Parhomenko, who at that time was our parliament reporter. Sergey said: “Congratulations, you caused the scandal in the Federation Council.” What happened was that the President of Northern Osetiya announced in the Federation Council that there was a horrible insult of the Osetiya people in “The Puppets” episode. I asked Sergey what was the insult, I was shocked, and he told me that the insult was expressed in the notion that “the people of Northern Osetiya were symbolized by a Muslim woman.” I was astonished, I never thought (and still don’t think) that “Muslim woman” is an insult, so I asked Sergey if it was possible to explain to the president the definition of the word “metaphor.” Sergey thought for a few seconds and then replied: “I wouldn’t recommend you doing that” (*laughter*).

Hence, they (*the politicians*), mostly were (*incomprehensible*) characters. Then I started to host the “Itogo” (“*Total*”) show, and I was watching what the TV people call “the sources,” the tapes the reporters were bringing in. I sat there watching these tapes, and let me tell you, there was no need even to listen to what they say: it was enough to look at them; these faces... Apparently, those who say that Soviets were conducting negative genetic selection are right (*laughter*). People there had faces-diagnoses, and the worst possible satire I could make was just to air them. I can say that, genre-speaking, my favorite trick was to remove myself completely from the scene: as Griboedov was saying, “I will tell such truth about you that is worse than any lie.” So, my job was to tell this truth: there was no need to slander; the only need was to show these faces... It was necessary to give the viewer a chance to listen to what they say... It was necessary to contrast the facts. There was no need, for example, to call them thieves or liars—now I will tell you the best joke of the Itogo show. The joke isn’t mine, it belongs to my editor-in-chief, a great person, a sinolog, a unique character with a sharp inner feeling of humor. He found this style, brought it to me, I laughed on the floor from laughter hysteric and understood that I did not need to add a single word to this joke. He collected the data regarding militants’ losses in Chechnya, the official data of our Joint Staff. It sounded approximately like this: first there were 1,500 militants in Chechnya, then in the combat 3 to 4 thousands were destroyed (*laughter*), and after that 5,000 were left (*laughter*). Then two years later, the data was: 8,000 killed, 11,000 left (*laughter*). During the show I simply announced this official data. Nothing funnier and more horrible than that could be made up. The major thing one had to do was to see through this, as the real satire is like alkali and water: separate from each other they do nothing, but once mixed, they start to splash and hiss. This data is funny once it’s combined; if it’s separate it’s not funny.

Generally, satire and humor are extremely context-dependent. For example, a 90-year old is asked: “How did you manage to reach such age?” He answers “All my life I worked hard and said truth.” Nothing funny, right? Pretty banal. Now I will tell you that these words belong to Sergey Mikhalkov... (*loud laughter*) Funny! Funny because of the context! In this sense, my job was to find something funny in something not funny, not to attempt doing something which most of my so-called “colleagues” do. Not to try to play a joke. For example, KVN as a genre is something very distant from me because it involves violence: you are being told “Here, you have 30 seconds, now tell us a joke!” This makes an impotent out of a person, just like any other formal assignment. Joke, just like love, is a child of freedom, it must spring up, arise, and it cannot appear out of an assignment. So, the only thing which one needs to do is to watch, open up the eyes and ears, and to make sure that people around you also see the funny through the mundane.

I got lucky: an absolutely unique team was formed around me. The success of The Puppets was in the first place determined by its team. There were Vasily Pichin and Alexander Levin, two amazing directors, who made the best episodes of The Puppets, turning them into small movies: they made the puppets alive. The actors-puppeteers got a grip over this monstrous, hard technology, and after some time the puppets became very expressive. There were brilliant actors involved in scoring: I will never forget Sergey Mikhrutov, who was the voice of many, many puppets—he would not only speak in the similar voice (that’s easy!), he would catch the character, the essence, “the grain” (as Stanislavsky said) of a politician. It was an amazing luck. Generally, the whole history of The Puppets is a history of good fortune and happy coincidences. So, by the time the Itogo was started, these wonderful people (editors-in-chief, directors) got attracted to me. Also, the timing itself was perfect for such sort of show—this was a unique epoch during which we were actually called for by the society. Right now, for example, we are expressing the views which are contrary to the public opinion, but at that time we had a feeling that we were with the current. In this sense, for a politician it is very important to ride the stream, and in my opinion the political genius of Gorbachev was that he always attempted not to swim against the current but with the current, and went pretty far with that. If in 1985 Gorbachev were given a transcription of what he would say in 1989, he’d shoot himself. It was absolutely unheard of. However, he had enough of inner flexibility to ride the stream; otherwise he would have the same fate as Ligachev and others.

And for some time (about three-four years), we were happy because we were driven by the supporting public opinion (I know it sounds banal). Here’s another coincidence: The Puppets show started in the middle of December of 1994, and in two weeks, during the New Year Eve of 1995, the Chechen War broke out. The war gave a new meaning to the show: when we started it, we were thinking of a comedy show, because the relation to the government was the following: yes, they are drunk, foolish, inadequate, illiterate, but they are OURS. There was a feeling that the government still had some relation to you, as if you were relatives, as if the government was your drunken mother: yes, shameful, yes, uneasy, but still yours. The “Yeltsin on the barricade” was still in the memory. But then one morning I woke up and realized that I was completely free from any obligations to them. The years of 1992-1993 were awful for satire: your hand was constantly stopped by your mind. You wanted to hit, but then realized that you were hitting someone who is on

the same side with you. Yes, there were communists, there were nationalists, but they (*the democrats*) were OURS. The Chechen war removed this internal conflict. Once I took a look at these faces: Grachev, Yerin, Korzhakov, Yeltsin... what “ours” could we talk about? It was a great liberation, and it was a happy epoch, because we were hitting them as hard as we could, and every week I understood that I was doing something millions of people wanted but could not do. I was doing it for my mom and dad. Really, my parents watching on TV the dirt of this war and they were bursting with indignation, yet they couldn’t do anything. I, at least, could yell—and it was a happy time.

Later, we started to pay the bills of 1996. The history of Putin started in 1996, this is my firm belief. Everything we have right now is what’s called a tragic guilt. It is the bill for the campaign “Vote or lose,” it is for forgetting basic truths which we studied in colleges (such as means and aims, etc). These ethical questions are only seen with what the French call “the stairs wit” and what the Russians call “be wise after the event:” this was so obvious, why no one understood it? The threat of Zuzanov was real, yet, unfortunately, we were fighting not the cause but the effect. The strength of Zuzanov was in the weakness and inconsistency of the democratic government. Both Zuzanov and this campaign can happen only in desolated, embittered nation. Zuzanov cannot happen in the country where more or less firm middle class exists. We were fighting with Zuzanov, who was turned into the scarecrow by our government.

Meanwhile, the major fight of the campaign was against Yavlinsky, because Yavlinsky was a real threat for Yeltsin, because he represented moving forward. The democratic Russia, if given a choice between Yavlinsky and Yeltsin, could actually support Yavlinsky—and right now I am not discussing their personal qualities, I am talking about (*incomprehensible*). By destroying Yavlinsky, the government changed the matter of choice: it turned out to be the choice between Yeltsin and Zuzanov. Moreover, Zuzanov was specially for that brought to Davos so that he would intimidate everyone. Well, he did—everyone knew his part in this play. This, by the way, is something that the government was always doing and continues to do nowadays. Generally speaking, this is the major mechanism of survival of modern Russian government. The most expressive story in this sense is the story of Zhirinovskiy—this is the best possible investment ever. Zhirinovskiy was created in 1989 in the Central Committee of KPSS when it became blatant that 6<sup>th</sup> article of constitution is dying (the article about single-party state) and that there were going to be many parties. They needed some sort of terror so that people would vote for KPSS. Did you want many parties? You got ‘em! Zhirik (*the nickname of Zhirinovskiy*) gets out, starts to wave foot-wraps in front of the whole world. The name was brilliant—“Liberal-Democratic Party.” In other words, two birds were killed with one stone: discrediting the concepts of liberalism and democracy (which never existed in Russia and even if they did everyone who could remember them by that time died)—You wanted liberalism? Here you go, here’s the liberal! the democrat! who screams “death to everyone!” Once you take a look at him, you decide that KPSS is better. This is what he (*Zhirinovskiy*) was created for. Moreover, later there even were documents regarding that, and they were shown on the TV, but for some reason, later these tapes were “magically” erased. But everyone knew the story—the Central Committee of the KPSS was validating

his party's documents, and the records regarding that were made, and in 1991 the trails of that were discovered... it's not that he really tries to hide it anyway.

Then this model was taken by Yeltsin, and then inherited by Putin. Every time a new "threat" springs up: first Zhirinovskiy, then Zuzanov, and for 2008 they scheduled the "threat" of nationalism. And the choice will be, again, between some sort of dreadful fascists and the civilized Vladimir Vladimirovich, who, obviously, is our only hope against the Nazis. All of this is an old game of good cop-bad cop, which Russian intelligentsia has experienced for several generations. We were caught in the pitfall: by bringing Yeltsin back to power in 1996, we made ourselves (and Yeltsin as well) the hostages of the methodology. This methodology was indeed very pleasing to the government: the idea that in three months you can inflate A's rating and destroy B's rating and the only thing you need is organization and money (and, of course, you always can find money for THAT). In 2000, this approach was exercised again, but that time against us.

It was a very lucrative technology once in 1996 it turned out that the opinion of people does not really matter. And the most interesting question today is, however banal it is since the history cannot be revised (and there is no answer): what would happen if in 1996 in fair, honest, democratic elections Zuzanov would win? Some of my friends attempted to (sort of) calculate the consequences of this situation knowing the balance of forces and other factors. Many think that the communists would not have enough power to destroy democratic procedures. Moreover, democracy is a procedure, it's a banal statement, but it's a procedure. Anyway, in such situation, the default on the debts would probably happen during the elections (*of 1999-2000*) (the default would happen anyway under any government, just like the Gulf Stream happens regardless whether Democrats or Republicans are in the office). Even with all the marasmus and all the foolish mistakes they (*the Communists*) would make, and they would make all possible foolish mistakes, this is what they are there for, they only can tighten the screws, not loosen them (*laughter*) – this is how their hands are constructed... So they would tighten all the screws (*i.e., repress activities*), then everything would explode... But even with that, there would be an opportunity to change the government in the elections of 2000 (in case democratic procedures were saved). This would be a great example of the clock pendulum phenomenon which took place throughout the Eastern Europe, for example Lech Walesa was followed by Kwasniewski. Of course, their country is smaller, so the pendulum's oscillation is not as pronounced—in our country the pendulum can fly from Gaidar to Makashov, but oh well, the country is big. My conclusion (a bit risky one, I admit) is that Putin's epoch is a booby trap: it's not scary to step in, but the main difficulty is to get out of it alive. The method Putin got power, connected with the Second Chechen War and terrible violations of the law, provokes him to stay.

It puts him in the situation of no choice, just like the situation Boris Nikolaevich once experienced. He (*Yeltsin*) himself never stole any money, he didn't need them, he didn't even know how they look. There was a wonderful story of how he was brought to Russian Bistro (*the fastfood chain*) and in front of the cashier he was given the money to pay for the food—it was a brilliant camera shot: Boris Nikolaevich (*laughter*) looks at the

rubles and starts to scrutinize them – “oh wow, they have pictures on them!” (*laughter*) He didn't know how the money LOOK. So, once he was told a bit about his daughter and about the future that was awaiting the Family (literally and figuratively speaking), he became the hostage: he either had to follow the pursuit of Mucius Scaevola and burn his right hand or to do what he ended up doing. Same thing (but amplified) happened to Putin. The way he got the power makes him a hostage of this power. The thing is that he is different from Yeltsin, who was a historical figure regardless of what one thinks of him; he is an evolutionary figure, Putin knows all too well how he was brought to the power. I, as playwright, am extremely curious of how he was informed that he would be brought to power and I actually wanted to write a play about it. It must've been extremely interesting: I mean, it must've happened somehow. One can imagine that he was invited to one of those exclusive Moscow clubs where the cup of coffee costs \$10, and they told him something like “Vova, don't fall from the chair, you're going to be the next President! Don't worry, we'll tell you everything!” (*laughter*) What must've he felt? I tried to fantasize about it in *The Puppets*, I mean he probably would wake up in the night and pinch himself! I mean, one wakes up in the night and then in a moment remembers that he is the President of Russia! (*laughter*) It must've been horrible. And as they said in “Brilliant Hand,” I could've been in his situation, or anyone of us for that matter. However, to talk more seriously, the way he got the power and the way he preserved his grip on it throughout the story of NTV and the others... Yeltsin looked at us just like “the Russian Tsar looked at the Jew” (*laughter*): bothersome fleas we are! (*laughter*) But it was uneasy for him to step on us! I mean, Russian Tsar – it's not his business. When, once in a while, when he would actually step on us, someone would remind him:

- Boris Nikolaevich, did you forget, we're a democracy!
- Oh, right!

Once he was reminded that he's a Democrat he would remember it. He felt a dependence on democratic principles. Obviously, he wasn't a democrat, he was a Russian Tsar psychologically. However, he remembered (banally enough) that he was brought to power by his people, and this notion lived inside him. He sincerely believed in the principles which were projected onto him by this wave... He played many roles: a Democrat, a Tsar, a Tyrant; they all lived inside him. And for many years the politics of Russia were determined by the one who was drinking with Boris Nikolaevich. Korzhakov or Chubais, for example. Eventually Chubais gained access to his bed (just like customary “postelnichiy” (*literally, the one who stands next to bed, here this is meant as an allusion to the weak health of Yeltsin*)) and could whisper something on his ear. Before that, it was Korzhakov who determined whom to let speak to the President and whom not to. The ministers and the Prime Minister could not get to the President without the nod from the Guard. But, in his reign, it was all intermixed, and he felt that he was dependent on that democratic vocabulary, even though the evolution was quite pronounced.

You know what, let us change the style a little bit – I'm just going to alternate (*between direct speech and stories*). This is the story of what Hamlet called “the enterprises of

great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry.” It is not much of a secret who really is the main character.

## Grave burden (fairy tale)

Once upon a time, one Fedotkin became the President of Russia. Democratically-legitimately-elected one, and with the mandate from the Russians to make life as good as in Switzerland. Fedotkin wanted “...as in Switzerland” too, since he himself lived in our country for way too many years. What a great opportunity!

So, in the morning Fedotkin, all brisk and cheerful, goes to work in the Kremlin, takes out a pile of paper, clicks the Parker pen on and starts writing decrees. “On the Economy” (so that everything’s done the right way, not the dumb way), “On the Foreign Affairs without schizophrenia,” “On the ruble as fresh as a daisy...” The topic of human rights alone took up a pile of paper as thick as his finger! As Fedotkin gets done with the rights, he takes a look on the wall and notices some sort of um... people, who seem to be tortured by a chronic backache—so bent their backs are.

Fedotkin says: “Good morning, gentlemen, nice to meet you, I am the President of Russia, democratically-legitimately-elected, and who are you?” And they say: “We’re local. We’ll stand right by you, oh helmsman.”

Seeing this, Fedotkin left his place at the table, shook everyone’s hands, and even tried to rectify the two oldest ones (but failed!).

- Gentlemen, - he said, - I want everyone to start attending to their direct responsibilities!
- Aha! – they rejoiced. – so should we start?
- Right! – said Fedotkin gladly, and made an attempt to walk back to his table: he still had to finish writing about the Constitution and the interracial questions, alas it was not so easy. Suddenly his arm was linked through to someone: “Excuse me, Anton Ivanovich...” At first, Fedotkin was surprised—what is it, a coup?—a bit early for one, no?—but then it turned out that it’s not. The whole physically impaired collective moved him as far away from the table as they could and then started to cruise circles around him.

One of them immediately measured him with the tape-line, the other one checked the pulse and looked in the eye, the third one inquired regarding the menu: on which days does the Mister want cottage cheese and on which grated carrots? The fourth one, without saying a word, gave him the suitcase with the Red Button to click in case things get boring. Paralyzed Fedotkin just stands there with the suitcase in his hands. Finally, some bold one approaches him with the album and asks: “What about upholstery, Sir? We have a German one, an Italian one, then there is a purple- fascinated-with-ultramarine one. Oh! And regarding the parquetry! Would you like it the way it is now or should we arrange it differently?”

At this point, Fedotkin's volition returned: "Stop this boloney! Get that upholstery out of my face! Leave the parquetry alone! Breakfast should be standard! Don't you know what kind of time Russia experiences now?"

The servants exchanged glances: "Yes, sir, we do—as always, the time of unprecedented historical significance. So what, does it mean that now we can't even grate some carrots for our own democratically-legitimately-elected President?"

These words confused Fedotkin. "Fine, - he said. – I agree, but, please, faster, there still are the Constitution and the interracial relations!.. Time is money!"

Faster means faster—in the last moment before Fedotkin started writing again, someone appeared by his shoulder, standing in a slight bow.

Fedotkin grunted, clicked the Parker back off, and passed to the dining room. The dining room featured all the viands one could wish. Grated carrots (with sugar!) were there on the table, so was the freshest cottage cheese, standing next to the delicious brown toasts. Coffee-tea in the coffee pots, whipped cream in the pitchers, utensils in the napkins with monograms.... Fedotkin lost his nerve for a minute.

After good breakfast, Fedotkin returned to his desk, all energized by the viands. He clicked the Parker pen back on, reached for a blank paper, decidedly inscribed "On the Constitution," and even underlined the title thrice. Right after finishing with the title, he got distracted again: first, the protocol and all these ambassadors, then the administrative job (inventory of Kremlin Towers), then the bread-and-salt from always-grateful population, then the pedicure – since it is unbecoming for the President of Russia, democratically-legitimately-elected, to walk around with such pounces! By then it was a lunch time.

The menu became so much more impressive since the breakfast, that when Fedotkin got done with lunch it was time to start the dinner. Once stuffed, he was delivered to the sauna. That was the last straw, and Fedotkin finally started to look at things differently; he enjoyed great beer; he swam in the pool like an infant. He was happy. As the night arrived, he was delicately taken out of water, accurately dried, re-delivered to his desk and put back in front of the paper, thus finishing the circle. Fedotkin took a look at the title: "On the Constitution" (underlined).

What about this Constitution? Why about it in the first place? What is Constitution anyway? Fedotkin pondered on these questions for a while, and then seamlessly fell asleep. That's when the loyal hands transferred him to the bedchambers (without removing the Parker from his hands). In the morning, the dining table again was full of viands, and the hospitality of the staff became so pronounced that it was unbecoming to ignore it. And after that... Oh well, as it turned out, there is little sense to keep starting these papers, since no matter how hard he tried, Fedotkin never progressed beyond clicking Parker on and off.

Once—long after this first morning—Fedotkin woke up at six in the evening. First he drank some ale, then hiccupped for a while, then tried to feel if his soul needed anything else. The soul replied: “a cookie, perhaps.” He looked around, alas no cookie was found! Fedotkin got all upset, and called the lackey. No one replied. Fedotkin called for the second time—still no reply! He scowled, stood up, got the sleepers on, and started browsing Kremlin looking for the servants. And when Fedotkin found one sleeping on the Katherine’s encrustation, he shook the poor guy out of slumber and personally kicked him in his loyal, artless face. Next time, the cookie should be right next to the ale! In the midst of face-kicking, Fedotkin realized that this is what the democracy really should be about. He gathered his loyal physically impaired collective and made each and every one of them miserable. He mentioned each of them, no one was forgotten. The orders were given both regarding the menu and the upholstery (“in your face!”), as well as regarding the parquetry, which should be rearranged by tomorrow!

Oh, and on the Constitution... He talked about it with the security guy. The security guy called the doctors, and the doctors said: immediately remove this junk from your desk, it’s unhealthy! What about this Constitution anyway? There were enough of those and none helped.

And, as of Russia – once after good, sound sauna Fedotkin came to the conclusion that she’ll take care of herself. After all, we are a great country, not some stupid Switzerland (thanks God!). Like any normal horse, Russia just needs to be harnessed, and then she’ll find her way out to human settlements. That, of course, if she’s not going to die on the way.

THE END (*loud applauds*)

Should I read some more? Because it seems that so far I’ve been torturing you with lectures. Here’s the poem, it sort of develops the topic.

I love my Fatherland, but strangely...  
I wish my eyes would never see her:  
Her railroad stations’ saunas  
Her airports with their storages

Her special way throughout Galactic  
And her demented, hectic searches  
Her bloody, strange Spirituality  
Which carries Christ on Soviet flags

Hot-dogs are followed by pizzas,  
Occasionally loving Kaddaffi,  
She, with her birchen sieves  
Exasperated whole Eurasia

As if by magic cast a spell on

She lies alone just like the oaf  
And things get stolen if yet weren't  
And thieves take anything that's there

The roads have lost here their vector  
The peasants live their sad lives through  
If you say Greenpeace you'll get flipped off  
And kicking face is hobby too

The store is empty, the grill's busy  
The century is getting drunk out  
And jazz will always be high treason  
Around here they hit you gladly  
During the first course and the third course

And here's the second one which usually goes together with the first one.

Farewell, free Russia!  
Heredity is here to stand  
Again, the uniforms of blue  
Teach us loving Motherland  
I will have time to vomit thrice  
(Until they kick me out with fierce)  
From their omnipresent eyes,  
And their omnipresent ears.

Returning to the topic (Putin's popularity): it is pretty ambiguous, because, on one hand, undoubtedly, there is a great support for Putin's actions. This support signifies a very Russian method of building something wonderful on top of human bones, for example the way St. Petersburg was built. This support is based on the millennium-long habit of seeing government as a master. In this sense, Putin's period is very close in its tonality to Russian tradition. The master is not the manager. The western principle is based on the idea that people choose a manager who is getting paid out of their pocket. If he does his job poorly, they warn him, and then they fire him. The Russian tradition can be expressed in the brilliant phrase of Ezhe Letz: "The slave's dream is a market where he can buy himself a master." We go to that market to buy ourselves a master. People subconsciously chose a master, not a manager. This is the root of the problem—and the problem is not in Putin per se. The problem is that there is a need for a master. It's a habit. Such habit requires no stress for the soul, it's something genetic.

You see, if I wanted to become tall and blonde, I'd have to go through plastic surgeries, bend my bones—in other words, it'd take a lot of effort. If I wanted to stay the way I am, I wouldn't need to do anything. Same thing with society—to have Putin, to live the way we live, we don't need to do anything; we just need to relax (which is nice). Yes, we just need to relax, because it is a natural way of existence in Russia. Doesn't matter how we

call him – “the Tsar,” “the secretary general,” “the president of Democratic Russia,” doesn’t matter; he’s a master who knows where to lead us.

The problem is that, due to a complete lack of democratic experience in Russia, people do not see the cause-and-effect link between the results of election and the subsequent standard of living. My daughter is 18 years old now, she’s a sophomore in the University, she’s a Social Anthropology major, and I get to talk with the professors, plus she tells me many interesting things, etcetera. So, what I learned is that only recently people discovered the cause-and-effect link between the coitus and the pregnancy. This happened only recently, a couple of hundred thousands years ago. Before that, for millions of years, the process was approximately the following: first some sort of desire springs up, then that desire is realized, and then, for some reason, your girl starts to puff up! (*laughter*) Of course, no connection or link is seen. Then, after some time, that link was noticed. It took some time, however. Before that, these two things were considered to be absolutely independent from each other. Exactly similar to this story is the behavior of the people: first, excuse me my French, we put in that hole whatever, and then, oh my God, out of nowhere we get wars, poverty, terror! (*applauds*) And no connection is seen.

Related to that is this story. Once in 1996, I was having lunch in a café, and while sitting there I was recognized by the group of New Russians, you know, just like the ones from all the anecdotes. They are not around anymore, they all shot each other down. (*laughter*) This is true, it was a special type of people in the early 90’s: crimson suits, square heads, gold chains... They are not around anymore, in the wars for budgets they self-annihilated. Some of their children study in Oxfords now. So, in the fall of 1996, I was recognized by five of these “bulls.” They were Vologda (*a small provincial town in European Russia*) businessmen, they came to Moscow to (brilliant phrase, linguists will appreciate this) “reshat’ voprosy” (“*solve for questions,*” *i.e. take care of problems*). Usually, you either answer the questions or solve for answers. Well, they came to “solve for questions” to Moscow. They were sitting there, getting drunk, cursing out their lives, and guess what, I was called to account. They recognized me as the face from the TV, and, apparently, in their minds, I was responsible for all other faces in the TV. And such situations weren’t unique—Leonid Yakubovich once received a letter asking him to tell Jean-Claude Van Damme something. I guess the guy thought that all of us live in the TV and all of us are neighbors. So, as the person from the TV box, I am supposedly responsible for everyone who’s around me, and they called me to account. They asked me “When will all of this chaos, banditry and corruption stop?” I asked them who they voted for. It turned out that out of five two voted for Yeltsin, two voted for Zhirinovskiy, and one voted for Zuzanov. And the guy who voted for Zhirinovskiy asks me when the corruption will stop. See, people don’t see this connection.

The democracy is not a jackpot. You can’t just guess a number, win, and get all the money. There are intermediate steps. And it takes a long time to understand the connection between the freedom of speech, independent opposition, and independent judiciary branch and your own standard of living. You either have to learn it or to be born in the country where it’s obvious. I think any British proletarian who sits in the pub, drinks beer, and roots for, say, “Arsenal” (or “Chelsea,” which is better!) realizes that

those who he chooses are his servants. I think he feels that. I think he knows that politicians are not his masters, and that it is he who pays them wage, since he was born in the country in which this is obvious.

In our country, sometimes you have to explain such basic fact even to people with the degrees and PhDs. When there was the conflict around NTV, people who were sympathizing with us told me “Oh, you guys have problems.” And I always said: “I don’t have any problems. It is you guys have problems. I’m fine – I work, I get paid, I’m alright. You’ve got problems, not me. I have daughter, for example, she doesn’t need to go to the army. Do you have a son? Yes? Well, then, you have problems. He will grow up, go to army, and get killed there by a commander. Or he’ll be sent to Chechnya.” It is amazing: people still consider freedom of speech to be needed by us, the chatterboxes, not by them. People think it’s done only to demonstrate democratic procedures for the West, for Strasburg. So that they leave us alone. So that, say, Paris Club (*bank association*) gives us money and leaves us alone. There is a great irritation that the West teaches us how we’re supposed to live in our country. They say to Paris Club: “Give us money and get out! Give us money, and we know what to do with it! Don’t teach us!”

Either that or blackmail. In 1989, Gorbachev visits Japan. Japan was ready to give us 50 billion dollars of credit with 0% APR if we agreed to return them four islands of Kuril range. Four rocks for 50 billion dollars. On his way, Gorbachev stops at Vladivostok. In Vladivostok, some well-trained guy addressed him “Mikhail Sergeevich, what about the islands, are we actually going to give them away?” Gorbachev says “No trade here is possible. This is not going to happen. This is our territory, and we won’t give it away.” After that, he gets on the plane and flies to Tokyo. What’s the point? Didn’t you just say that we won’t give the islands away? So, he arrives to Tokyo, and they ask him “Wait, what happened there in Vladivostok?” And Mikhail Sergeevich shows them the pictures of Egor Kuzmich Ligachev and General Varennikov and says “Guys, give me money, because if these guys get on top, not only you won’t see these four islands, you’ll probably lose the ones you have now. (*laughter*) It’s ok, if you don’t want to give me fifty, give me ten then. Support me, because if I walk, it’ll be a catastrophe.”

This dialogue is continued for 15 years. They say: “Take a look at Putin. He’s civilized. You don’t want fascists to come, now do you?” Even though these fascists are being fed by the Kremlin, and even though Glaziev-Rogozin’s campaign was paid for by the Administration. Last Duma elections had unofficial motto “Destroy the communists,” and everyone knew that. All these “Motherlands” and other parties were organized by Kremlin to steal communist votes. This is an old game; it is being continued for many years.

I will read you two little political plays.

### **BIRTH OF RATING**

- Good afternoon. Is this 33-32-23?
- Yes.

- Burov Stepan Ilyich?
- That's me.
- Stepan Ilyich, what do you think about Putin?
- Me?
- You.
- And who's speaking?
- This is CCPOS.
- Who?
- Center for Civil Public Opinion Studies. Let us repeat the question: what do you think about Putin?
- Why me?
- Don't worry, Stepan Ilyich. The poll only takes two minutes. Do you have two minutes for us?
- NO! I'm busy... umm, I'm eating.
- Please, you must realize the importance of this for the whole country. Tell us what you think of Putin's actions and then continue eating.
- What do I think of Putin's actions?
- Yes.
- You mean, me personally?
- Yes.
- I may be mistaking, you know?
- We're interested in your personal opinion. What is your attitude toward Putin's actions? Very positive, positive, rather positive than negative, rather negative than positive, negative, very negative, or do you want him to die?
- NO!
- What?
- I NEVER SAID THAT!
- What?
- I NEVER SAID ANYTHING!
- What?
- Nothing! I never said anything! I'm having dinner! I have two children! They won't survive without the father!
- Stepan Ilyich...
- How do you know my name?
- We have all the statistical data.
- You're not the CCPOS.
- Who are we, then?
- I'm not going to tell you.
- Stepan Ilyich.
- Leave me alone!
- Stepan...
- Leave me alone! I'm hypertonic, I have high sugar, I'm an old person!
- Comrade Burov!
- Yes!
- Stop this hysteria immediately! We want the answer: what do you think about the President of Russia Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. Tell us and enjoy your dinner!

- I don't want dinner! I don't want anything!
- Burov! You're annoying. Tell us now: what's your attitude toward Vladimir Vladimirovich – and then do whatever you want. Here are possible answers: very positive, positive...
- No! That's enough, no need to continue. The attitude's positive!
- Positive or very positive?
- VERY, VERY, VERY POSITIVE!
- Thank you. Why couldn't you tell us right away? You're weird.

Actually, it is almost not a joke. I mean, people are getting stopped on the street and being asked “Hey, what do you think about Putin?” Well, how would a normal Russian react to the question “What do you think about the Tsar who also is a head of Security Service?” Well, what can one say? Sure think he's great! I mean, in Germany, in, say, 1934, if a random person on the street were asked “What's your attitude toward Hitler?”—“Very positive!”

## **Second play**

- Good morning! I am a representative of the “Reputation” company, black and gray PR professionals.
  - Umm, black and gray who?
  - Is this an election committee?
  - Yes, it is.
  - And who are you?
  - The cook.
  - Listen, lady, get me someone literate here, and fast!
  - Pavel Ignatyevich, visitors!
- Pavel Ignatyevich enters.
- Good morning! I am a representative of the “Reputation” company, black and gray PR professionals. Results guaranteed.
  - Details?
  - Regarding the black or the gray one?
  - The black. The completely black one.
  - We guarantee absolute moral devastation of the competitor. We will produce disreputable biography with all the documents and testimonies. You can choose among the following libels: stealing in high school, schizophrenia, participation in Jegova witnesses sect, high treason, masturbation...
  - Rates?
  - From a thou to a hundred.
  - A hundred thousand dollars?
  - A hundred would guarantee an investigation in the TV news.
  - Great, great, and I want a major investigation!
  - No problem! Moreover, we can arrange it in such a way that there will be no other news but your investigation that day. Although, the rate for that is two hundred.
  - Do you do wholesale? Everything that you mentioned – the sect, masturbation, high treason, but altogether. So that he'd never recover.

- Six zeros and you've got a deal.
- A million dollars? You must be kidding me.
- Don't you want him not to recover after that?
- I sure do. By the way... One sec (talking on the phone). Hello! Sergey, can you find out for me how much will it cost us to waste a guy? Yes, physically liquidate! Doesn't matter whom, anyone! Alright, I'm waiting. (talking to the visitor) Alright, let's compare the bills. (talking on the phone) What? Thanks! (back to the visitor) Bummer for you, isn't it? For a million, I can hire enough hitmen to waste him together with his election committee and all his voters! No PR is needed.
- This is called dumping!
- This is called free market.
- Ok, eight hundred.
- You've got to be kidding me.
- Well, how much are you ready to pay?
- Wholesale?
- Yes.
- Including with high treason and masturbation?
- Aha.
- Three hundred!
- Oh, you've got to be kidding me.
- Three hundred is a max.
- You're a peculiar person. Alright, you know what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna contact his office, and in five minutes you'll be the one masturbating here!
- NO!
- Guaranteed. Also, we'll arrange you a green Islamic flag in the bedroom and child abuse during state holidays! Would you like that?
- NO!
- Tomorrow in the news. Don't miss out.
- Alright, five hundred.
- Report on your bestiality, villa on Bahamas, and kinship with Chikatilo, huh?
- Seven hundred thousand, and let's shake on it!
- You see, I knew we were going to compromise.

There is a great Russian saying: “V kazhdoy shutke est' dolya shutki” (“*Part of every joke is a joke*”) A joke itself is only a part of a joke, the rest is truth. If I know one thing about life it's that life is even more paradoxical and funnier and more tragic than any joke. That's why I think when we'll get to read some honest memoirs about this epoch, I'm pretty sure Svetonius will be put to shame. And the last play:

### **Dialogue of the President and his people. Preparations.**

The characters:

THE CONSULTANT.

MASHA. The assistant.

THE BOY.

The setting: Five hours drive out of Moscow.

MASHA: Just got a call from the Apparatus. They want a grandma with the question about pensions.

THE CONSULTANT: She's rehearsing already.

MASHA: They also want a grateful soldier.

THE CONSULTANT: The soldiers are ready. They stand in the field for the fifth day in a row. Each of them is very grateful.

MASHA: They also want a boy.

THE CONSULTANT: Who? The soldiers?

MASHA: No, Moscow. They want a smart Slavic boy about 10-11 years old. They want him to ask the President something cute.

THE CONSULTANT: Masha, I am not an idiot, I got it.

MASHA: I brought you a boy, by the way.

THE CONSULTANT: Awesome. I hope he's an orphan?

MASHA: No, but that can be fixed.

THE CONSULTANT: WHAT?

MASHA: I mean, we can find another one.

THE CONSULTANT: No time for that, let's try this one.

THE BOY ENTERS.

THE CONSULTANT: Oh, you eagle! What's your name?

THE BOY: Andrysha.

THE CONSULTANT: Andrysha, tomorrow the President himself will talk with you. Do you know who our President is?

THE BOY: Putin.

THE CONSULTANT: Correct. And what's his name?

THE BOY: Andrysha.

THE CONSULTANT: Masha, what did you bring here?

MASHA: A boy, a Slavic one.

THE CONSULTANT: We need a smart boy, did you forget?

MASHA: Oh, you're lucky you haven't seen the rest.

THE CONSULTANT: Alright... Andrysha, concentrate. The president's name is Vladimir Vladimirovich. Tomorrow he'll talk with you over the dish.

THE BOY: People don't talk over the dish.

THE CONSULTANT: I'll tear out your fingernails, boy.

THE BOY: NO!

THE CONSULTANT: Then don't say a word, just listen! Tomorrow the President himself will talk with you. You will say "Hello" and then you'll ask him... Masha, what will he ask him?

MASHA: "What time is it?"

THE CONSULTANT: Masha, You need to sleep.

MASHA: Oh, oh, oh! Sle-e-ep! It's so cold, no hot water here, we're in the middle of the nowhere, I can't take it anymore!

RUNS OUT SCREAMING AND CRYING

THE CONSULTANT: Right... Boy, what's your name again?

THE BOY: Andrysha.

THE CONSULTANT: Andrysha, right. So, you got it, right? Tomorrow the President himself will talk with you. You'll ask him something cute, alright?

THE BOY: Mister, can I go?

THE CONSULTANT: Stop there, you! Ask him something like "Who did you want to be when you were a boy?" Stop, no, not that. Tell him: "I want to play sports, but we don't have a single sport club in our village." And he'll say "Andrysha, you'll have one tomorrow. Dzydo and mountain skiing."

THE BOY: Wait, how do you know what he will say?

THE CONSULTANT: Andrysha, remember about the nails. Don't interrupt me – just listen. He'll tell you about the skis. You'll tell him "Many thanks." Then the President will make a joke and then he'll ask you to say hi to your mom and dad.

THE BOY: Wow! Really?

THE CONSULTANT: Have I ever lied to you, Andrysha?

THE BOY: Oh, can my dad call him later?

THE CONSULTANT: Wait, you have a phone at home?

THE BOY: There's one at the post office.

THE CONSULTANT: Sure. Tell you dad to go to the post office and call the President.

THE BOY: Great. What's the number?

THE CONSULTANT: Doesn't matter, Andrysha. Our president hears everything.

Thank you. You're a great audience, I am very happy. I feel even better than during Moscow hearing. Yes, this is my problem: my audience moved here.

Alright. Any questions?

QUESTION: What are your relations with Kiselev?

ANSWER: No relations. I've been the hostage of "The Team" idea for way too long. It's not the most dramatic event which happened in my life, but this label "Kiselev's Team," it has some validity, yes. He was considered to be the boss—but at the same time, if a bunch of people walks on the street together at the same time, they are still different. I can say that such labeling of journalists, and I tried to get rid of it. I consider Kiselev's behavior to be correct and honest, but I still think he was responsible for what happened to us, because we paid the bill of 1997 when NTV was involved in oligarchic property fights. Kiselev participated in this fight, and this fight for property bounced back to us in 2000. This fight disrupted us, because when afterwards we talked about the freedom of speech and public interest, we were told "Yeah, right. You helped Gusinsky in Svyazinvest war." There really is the historic interest of the country: when 4 years ago we were pointed to the imperfections of Kiselev and others, I said: "The history is produced by private interests. French revolution was made possible by private interests of revolutionaries. Two members of Politbureau destroyed Soviet Union. They did it in private interests, but still followed some sort of historic interest." And when we fought for the right to be independent from the government, we and Gusinsky and Kiselev were on the side of the public interest, and the horror which is around now is there because we are not there anymore. At that time, Khodorkovsky speculated about "the dispute of managing subjects," even though he did help Gusinsky with money when the latter's

accounts were arrested, but he didn't want to announce his position publicly. Publicly, he talked about "the dispute of managing subjects," and now there's no one around to help him. Regarding the original question, I have normal relations with Kiselev, we see each other at the Committee-2008, but we never really were friends anyway.

QUESTION: Putin, pretty much, was appointed to be the President. Do you know, by any chance, what he thinks of those who appointed him?

ANSWER: I do not know. You see, the thing is that those who appointed him were gradually kicked out, and this is (politically) classic. Berezovsky isn't there anymore, Voloshin isn't there anymore, Kasyanov was fired because of his connections to them. I don't know what he thinks of them, but I can guess that he doesn't like them, because it is vexing to realize that one has obligations. And in his attempt to hold the power, he gave birth to many personal (not political) enemies. Kasparov and I are his political enemies, but not personal. However, there is Khodorkovsky, Gusinsky, and all Chechen people. And the thing is that we can only pity him because with no bodyguards he'd live 10 minutes. In this sense, the lucrative chance to stay at power longer has an impact on him. So, I think his attitude toward those who appointed him is rather negative. But again, I guess, I do not have any information. I only know about such things from talks with people who are well-informed, but such things actually hinder my work, because I am not supposed to speculate on something that everyone doesn't know. My job is to talk about public things, known things, while all this egg-headed analytics (*Kremlinology*) is not for me.

QUESTION: Surprisingly enough, Kasparov, the head of this Committee-2008 group, entered the political arena. What do you think of him as of a politician?

ANSWER: He's not a politician. This is a civil activity. Politician is someone who plans to be elected, get some office. He plays checkmates quite well. He's brilliant. When you stand next to him, you feel like you stand next to the electric high-voltage generator. He's amazing and brilliant. The uniqueness of the Committee-2008 and the reason why it caused stress in the Kremlin is because it is the first, starting 1990, organization not sanctioned by the Kremlin, like everybody else. All political life in Russia is a wrestling of Nana boys (*moppet-show*). For example, right now they form an election committee for Glaziev and later they'll fight him, his own creature. And they surely will win. And then we appear, the people who are absolutely independent from them. We don't have huge bank accounts or off-shore companies. Those who join us are divided onto two categories: poets, politicians, journalists who sign our declaration and join us publicly, and business people, who give us money but beg us not to mention their names. Because if we mention their names today, tomorrow they will get the firefighters, the Sanitation department, and the tax people on their backs. Business can be destroyed, but not us. Then again – they try to get us. For example, when you prolong the rent contract for the property, the landlord (trying not to look directly in your eyes) says that he has other plans. Yes, that happens. But we do not have real estate, and we do not plan to. We have the lounge of Novaya Gazeta where we meet... 10 rubles for tea... But yes, we do plan to collect money, to pay for conducting polls of public opinion. By the way, regarding the

polls, my friend, who is a sociologist, told me about absolutely amazing things which started to happen: they started to interrogate sociologists lately. Also, another strange thing: people are being asked – “What’s your attitude toward Putin?” and you get 70% support. But then when other questions are being asked – regarding the corruption, the crime, the War in Chechnya, everything which involves the real politics – everywhere the attitude is negative. The crime increased, the corruption increased, people want peace in Chechnya – basically, every aspect is anti-Putinist. However, he somehow separated himself from his own policy.

QUESTION: What do you think of the campaign of Rybkin and Khakamada, and what do you think happened to Rybkin?

ANSWER: I think I know what happened with Rybkin, and even though I do not have the liberty to say what it was, I can tell you that it is not what he says it is. At the same time, from what I know, it is a rare example of the situation in which FSB actually was not involved (*laughs*). Regarding Khakamada, she’s a very purposeful woman-politician, who actually has real principles. On the other hand, it was her who flew in Washington the next day after the takeover of NTV to appease State Department and speculate about “the conflict of managing subjects.” They (that whole team of Chubais) decided to implement the reforms from the top, not from the bottom (very Russian way of doing things). They decided that they would use Putin to push their own political agenda. Well, we know what this ended up in. This reminds me of an old joke: “Once upon a time, a poor young boy married a very old grandma in order to inherit her money. When the boy died, all his toys were inherited by the grandma.” This joke perfectly describes the relation of the Kremlin and SPS. They thought they married a rich old grandma. Khakamada’s decision to run for the President is, in many ways, dictated by her own ambitions and her own situation. I attempted to talk her out of this as much as I could when we met in the hallways of Echo of Moscow.

*(end of tape)*