

## **Humit Paskushev: „Nobody is sure about tomorrow”**

### **How do you assess the present situation in Chechnya?**

As unstable. There were ten years of war and the end is not visible yet. The industry, the economy, agriculture, culture, education and the natural environment are destroyed. All inner-Chechen resources are exploited without obeying any norms and rules. In the Republic, there are three de facto powers: the main struggling forces and the criminals, including international terrorism, due to the situation, acting under different flags. The peaceful population was deprived of civil rights, beaten by all forces and trying to survive. Nobody, not even the politicians and the civil servants, let alone ordinary people, are sure about tomorrow

### **How do you assess the present day reconstruction?**

It is inefficient and insufficiently considered, and originated more toward a deflation of money from the Russian budget, and an uncontrolled exploitation of local resources for the enrichment of Federal and Chechen civil servants and criminals. Nobody is sure about tomorrow: the situation can suddenly worsen, and military activities can begin, and all reconstruction work could be destroyed as it has happened several times before. Therefore civil servants are mainly interested to make money in all possible ways, and to bring the money out of the republic. The result is a complete corruption of civil servants, and local authorities. As declared, dozens of billions of roubles<sup>1</sup> are spent for the reconstruction, but the efficiency is about 10 -15%. That is why on a certain stage the persons and enterprises involved in reconstruction themselves could become customers of the activation of military actions and terrorist activities in the Republic. Something like this happened after the first military campaign. For example, in a certain terrorist act, a governmental building was demolished, but just the part where the financial department was located.

### **Who benefits? And how?**

The fortune which the civil servants in Moscow make are the meant to help in reconstruction, civil servants in Chechnya, criminals, resistance fighters, terrorists.

Although in the republic all formal attributes of the authority are re-established, there is no efficiency of the work and just no work apparent. All supplies to Chechnya including humanitarian aid are divided by these three parties. Every party try to get as much as possible. It is impossible not to share because otherwise you can be killed. And every civil servant and every businessman knows it.

All goods necessary for the reconstruction of Chechnya are bought for three times the normal prices from mediators and bogus companies. And even these goods bought so expensively are partially sold out before coming to Chechnya. The rest is stolen by the named forces, so that ultimately 10-15% were used for the reconstruction.

Only pensions are regularly reaching the people.

### **Why was Akhmad Kadyrov appointed as Chechen president?**

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<sup>1</sup> 35 Rbl = 1€

The central Federal authorities probably considered it as an efficient way to show the world that former separatist leaders are defecting to the “Federalists”. It should weaken social tensions and to set off the population against armed resistance. The central authorities considered that Kadyrov will be more efficient in the struggle against the resistance movement using the same methods as the resistance fighters. But an exchange of Kadyrov to any other person would not change the situation.

To change the situation and to achieve stability in Chechnya, two problems have to be solved.

**1) The civil rights of ethnic Chechens in the Russian Federation should be restored** if Russia wants to see Chechnya and the Chechens as part of the Russian Federation (RF). In the Yeltsin period the Russian policy gave the impression that Russia wants Chechnya but without Chechens.

The present leadership of the RF should have enough political will and power to resist and to struggle against forces in Russia gaining financial, political and career capital thanks to the situation in Chechnya and to make decisive steps toward a full restoration of the civil rights of the Chechens.

“Yeltsinists” [Russian politicians close to former Russian president Yeltsin] and Chechen politicians created the political base for the Chechen war during the disintegration of the USSR. They imposed the war on the Chechen people against its will. In its essence the war developed to something like a private company “Chechen War Ltd.” with transactions of 50 – 60 billions of Roubles. This “limited company” is used for uncontrolled thievery of budget money. State officials, politicians, military servicemen use the conflict for gaining political capital in the power struggle in domestic policy.

**2) It is necessary to overcome the main factor of the Chechen tragedy – the division of the Chechen people.** This split is an achievement of the new ambitious and short-sighted Chechen politicians in the beginning of the nineties, who followed the destructive forces of Russia. They led the people to war. This war can be ended only if the Chechen themselves overcome the dividing factors.

### **How could the war be ended? What could be the steps of a peace settlement?**

If minority peoples are involved in conflicts one should consider that besides valuable international and national laws minority peoples have their own inner laws and norms. These laws and norms are developed through many centuries and correspond to the mentality, traditions, customs and conditions of life of the people. They are the foundation of the inner organisation and regulation of minority peoples and their decision making in important situations including conflicts.

The minority peoples are partially adapting to common and standard norms and laws. Their internal laws are losing their influence. The minority peoples are partially adsorbed and assimilated in the environment of bigger peoples. But they are aware of their ethnic peculiarities and therefore at least passively resisting the process of assimilation. There are many examples of disappearing minority peoples.

The attempts of big states to hasten this process artificially because of political, economical or other interests gaining over a part of the population or their leaders always lead to a conflict.

The correlation between national laws corresponding to the universally accepted norms and the internal laws of minority peoples depend on degree of civilisation of the state and the majority peoples within whom live the minority peoples and the level of the development of the minority people itself.

As the inner laws of a minority people are slowly removed from universally accepted international norms, they are applied secretly and disclaimed. If the application of internal laws is denied it is difficult to study and control their application.

In conflict situations especially those imposed from outside or as a result of external influence there is a tendency to prefer internal laws, but the community is unable to apply them because of the inner division of the society. For the society it is a dead end situation.

Such situations cannot be resolved without understanding the traditional mechanism of the solution of difficult internal conflict. Only by an efficient internal conflict solution the situation can be transformed to a position enabling the application of common international rules and laws of conflict resolution.

External interference in particular by international organisations, would be inefficient without taking into consideration the peculiarities of the minority peoples. Otherwise such conflicts are enduring and can end with complete suppression and disappearance of the minority peoples.

For the cessation of the war in Chechnya it is necessary to solve the **two above mentioned problems** (1) the civil rights of ethnic Chechens in the Russian Federation and 2) the division of the Chechen people) considering the ethnic peculiarities of the Chechen people and the history of Russian-Chechen relations.

The solution of the first question depends on the political will and the resoluteness of the Russian leadership.

The solution of the inner-Chechen problem depends on the people of Chechnya, its leaders and their determination to stop the tragedy and the support of external forces understanding our ethnic peculiarities.

The solution of these questions is the solution of the question of war and peace.

If the political leadership of the Russian Federation will declare its decisiveness to solve the problem of Civil rights of the Chechens and will make steps in this direction, the Chechens should resolutely make steps to a solution of the problem of inner Chechen contradictions. There will be help on this way. Only by this means we can overcome the main hindrances on the way to a conflict solution, stabilisation of the situation and normalisation of the life in the Republic. And only by so doing can one speak about a peace plan.

Such a plan considers the two questions mentioned, and the particular situation of which I proposed and published in 1996 in the article "It needs a transitional leader" in the national newspaper [Nezavisimaya gazeta](#).

Unfortunately it was impossible to put such plan into practice because then it was a period of internal political chaos in Russian. Ambitious politicians played the

Chechen card in their struggle for power, and used the Chechen tragedy to gain financial, political and career capital. Different political Russian forces far from the national interests ingratiated themselves with the then Chechen leaders and encouraged and pushed them to a confrontation.

### **How much time it would be need for implementing peace in Chechnya?**

Calculations within the framework of the peace plan of 1996 based on the financial potential of the Russian Federation and local resources showed that at least 2 years would be necessary for the demilitarisation of the Republic and the reconstruction of the basic social and economic infrastructure, and 5 – 6 years for the reconstruction of the economy of the Republic.

If the proposed plan would be adopted we would have in Chechnya a reconstructed economy developing none the worse then any other region of the Russian Federation.

### **How could the economy be reconstructed?**

Before reconstruction the two problems mentioned regarding civil rights of Chechens in Russia and inner Chechen reconciliation should be resolved.

To understand the priorities of the possible process of reconstruction and the approaches one should picture today's situation in Chechnya.

During the war in Chechnya, the economy, industries, agriculture, social and economical infrastructure were completely destroyed. Roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, industrial, cultural and scientific objects were demolished as well as most of the dwellings and communications. The natural environment was seriously polluted. The most active people, skilled workers and technicians, intellectuals, youngsters and all who had an opportunity, left the Republic. Many persons became refugees outside of Russia.

The remaining persons lost their jobs, skills and qualifications. They are unable to work. Because of the terror, punishment and hardship many people lost their health. The grown up youngsters have not seen a normal life. They are mainly ignorant and unskilled, and even illiterate.

The former urban population mainly left the Republic. Instead those trying to survive, rural people from destroyed villages and hamlets, settled in Grozny and other urban localities.

That is why the priority should be given to reconstruction of the agriculture and its social and economical infrastructure.

Villages should become economically and socially attractive in order that rural people would return to their traditional labour and way of living. The reconstruction of agriculture would need much less money for investment than the reconstruction of the industry. The output will be earlier and the people will be occupied with productive labour. The return of the rural population to their villages will free the dwellings in the towns for the skilled urban people needed for the reconstruction of the industry, complicated technological objects and so on.

Second priority should be given to oil-producing, oil processing and petrochemical industries as well as the urban infrastructure.

Then third priority should be given to reconstruction of the other industries, municipal services, social, cultural, educational and scientific facilities etc.

### **How do you see the perspectives of the future existence of the Chechens in Russia and with the Russians?**

Russia is a multiethnic and poly-confessional country. For stability, such a country needs a well thought-out, balanced ethnic policy. Unfortunately Russia does not have such a policy.

With connivance of the authorities and support of the law enforcement agencies by instigation of destructive forces in Russia, there is an increase in the number of cases of ethnic intolerance accompanied by violence, disturbances and pogroms etc.

Despite such a policy the minority peoples of Russia for a long time becoming intimate with the ordinary and on the whole good natured Russian population do not want to lose the traditional good neighbourhood relations. To preserve stability in many ethnic regions, the minority peoples suffer of humiliation, contempt and discriminations of their rights. But the Russian population suffer it too. The division of citizens of a country into categories due to their ethnic origin will ultimately lead to disaster.

The case of Chechnya and the Chechens in Russia is a special one. Ten years of an anti-Chechen hysteria and the negative attitude to Chechens instigated by mass-media, presenting the whole people as bandits, terrorists and criminals produced a negative image of all Chechens as a people.

Almost all political broadcasts of the Central Russian TV with politicians contain anti-Chechen hysteria and accusations of the Chechens for all unthinkable sins. It happens at all levels and is exploited by unscrupulous persons, corrupted civil servants and especially by agents of "law enforcement agencies".

If a person is a Chechen he is suspicious. Any disreputable person can for greed, envy or personal enmity, arbitrarily accuse Chechens who could be arrested and persecuted by law enforcement agencies without any investigation and trial

Corrupted agents of law enforcement agencies limit Chechens in legal commercial activities, blackmail them, take away their businesses and property, produce faked complaints against Chechens, place weapons and drugs, and imprison them without investigation and trial. In doing so, they rely on "secret orders about the liquidation of commercial enterprises belonging to ethnic Chechens". Trials with Chechens are mainly prejudiced. That creates unbearable conditions of living and work for an average Chechen in Russia who is almost unable to defend his rights.

On every declaration of the President of the Russian Federation in the mass media about the unacceptability of identifying a whole people as bandits, terrorists, criminals come hundreds of utterances in the same media about Chechen bandits, terrorists, criminals and thousands cases of discrimination, persecution and human-rights abuses. This is the strongest reason for the armed resistance and for the migration of Chechens out of Russia.

Without resolute steps to overcome the instigated negative attitude to the Chechen people, in particular among the civil servants and agents of law enforcement agencies, there will be no future for the further lives of Chechens in Russia. Therefore a

balanced well thought-out and sensitive ethnic policy is needed in the Russian Federation.

The main difficulty for such a new ethnic policy of the Russian leadership would be the change of the orientation of the mass media, the counteraction of ambitious extremists, civil servants and law enforcement agencies, because the absence of an ethnic policy allows them to gain financial and political capital.

The cohabitation with Russians is not a problem - we easily came together and lived friendly together. The problem is the lack of ethnic policy in Russia and the resulting extremism and ethnic intolerance.

Therefore the future perspectives in Russia of the Chechens and other smaller ethnic groups directly depend on a positive ethnic policy in Russia.

### **Did you connect certain hopes with the second term of President Putin?**

At first, Putin's first term was burdened with certain obligations of the former president and his team, so that he had to govern with the old team without his own team and experience. Nevertheless he was able to stop the chaos in Russia and there were some symptoms of a positive stability in Russia.

Second, he began the second term with his own team, experience and plans about the future development of Russia.

Therefore there was some hope, that he will understand and realise the sources, reasons and moving forces of the Chechen tragedy and find a healthy solution to the conflict, helping to establish normal peaceful life. Also there was a hope that his team will develop a balanced ethnic policy uniting the peoples of Russia. But there are no visible signs of realisation of such plans. These hopes were disappointed.

### **How did the situation in Chechnya change after the death of Akhmad Kadyrov?**

Murder is a crime whatever its motivation. The murder of a human being is a tragedy for his relatives and uncertainty for those whose future is connected with him. But in Chechnya it is not decisive, because a continuation of the current solution to the Chechen problem will not stop homicide, terrorist actions and instability. In such a situation persons could die heading the confronting parties, they will be replaced by others, there will be temporal successes of the one or the other side, but there will be no principal changes without a solution of the two mentioned problems of human rights of ethnic Chechens in Russia and inner-Chechen reconciliation.

### **What do you intend to do now?**

I will continue to highlight the attraction of the Chechen and Russian public and all persons interested in a termination of this tragedy to the solution of the mentioned problems considering the ethnic peculiarities and the current situation in Chechnya. Therefore I prepared an appeal to the Chechen public.

## **APPEAL TO THE CHECHEN PUBLIC**

During the disintegration of the USSR, all peoples of our country were faced with uncertainty. At that period of the breakaway of the Great country there appeared new leaders – politicians and peanut politicians who used the outburst of frustration, resentment of many decades and the discontent of the previous social order, and pushed the peoples to thoughtless steps resulting in new problems and tragedies. But the majority of the new politicians in other parts of the former USSR were clever and wise enough not to lead their people to a big national disaster, although their ambitions and pretensions were not lesser than ours. Only our newly leaders and politicians did not stop. Their ambitions, lust for power, and political lack of foresight did not allow them to see what tragedy they were pushing their people toward. Only just brought to light, leaders at the beginning of the nineties divided their people and precipitated it into a ten year war without visible end.

We have many reasons to accuse Russia, but the main reason of our tragedy is that we allowed our leaders to divide our people.

The situation was used not only by Chechen and Russian destructive forces but also by international destructive forces including international terrorists. Their involvement only deepens our tragedy.

### **What did we get by allowing splitting our people?**

We got an endless war until the last Chechen, an endless tragedy, when dozens of thousand persons were killed, almost all urban locations were completely destroyed, the industry, the agriculture, the social and economical infrastructure are destroyed, the environment was so polluted that the survival of people is at risk. The republic is thrown back for decades in its economical, technical and cultural development, in science and education. And the worse, we are losing our centuries-old traditions, our mentality, our custom law – Adat, the pride of our ancestors who kept it. Our people were respected for the adats; losing them we lose any perspective as a people.

This is the price we paid, we pay and we will pay. When we allow our leaders to divide us in the Republic there will be neither stability nor order. We will have no

future if we follow leaders who split us irrespective their slogans and their proposed future paradises.

**That is why we should overcome the dividing factors before starting a new presidential campaign, building on the centuries-old experience of our ancestors. Our adats and our mentality which always helped our people to survive in difficult situations can unite and protect our people. Our problems can be solved only by this way.**

**In the name of the preservation of our people and its future perspectives we should decisively declare that only a president, a parliament and a government elected after reconciliation are entitled to represent the interests of our people. All persons who represent or tried to represent our interests until now irrespective of the origin of their authority should declare that they will abdicate after elections after reconciliation.**

**That is what we should reach before an electoral campaign.**

We, the Chechens are organised into lineages, taips [clans], tukkhums [unions of clans], locations, rayons. Every such unit has its own authorities - elders, spiritual leaders, educated and respected persons. Their decisions were always like a law for all Chechens irrespective of their official position. Every Chechen exists within this framework. A person who refused to follow the common decisions of such bodies was not entitled to represent the interests of Chechens and was not even to be named a Chechen. Such persons were rejected by the people and outcast from the people. By this way our people preserved stability, overcame splits, preserved our traditions, adats and mutual respect and survived as a people.

**All spiritual, religious leaders, elders and leaders of lineages, taips, tukkhums, locations and rayons should discuss the actual situation, make conclusions and demand from their representatives, irrespective of the side they belong in the inner-Chechen conflict to obey the new Chechen leadership elected after the reconciliation. Regarding persons who will refuse to obey, decisions should be taken corresponding to our adats, traditions and our ethnic mentality.**

**Ultimately it is necessary to conceive a national assembly of representatives of all Chechen lineages, taips, tukkhums, and rayons and to declare a common**



**decision obligatory for every person considering himself as Chechen. Those who disagree should be ultimately outcast by a common decision of their lineage, taip, tukkhum.**

**The same assembly should nominate candidates for the Chechen presidency from educated and trustworthy persons who did not take part in the division of our people in this tragic period. The same priorities should be applied to the parliamentary elections.**

Only after such decisions are taken, a new leader of Chechnya and a new parliament can be elected.

There is no other way for a quick termination of the crisis, stabilisation, reconstruction of the social and economical infrastructure, re-establishing order and normal human conditions of life, and survival of our people.

May Allah give us power, wisdom and resoluteness to make the right steps on the way of the salvation of our long-suffering people.

We want to direct the attention to such an attitude to a solution of the problem and to change the approach to the election campaign of the Chechen president. Before any elections of a new leader of the Republic, there should be a resolute step made in Russia and in Chechnya toward a solution of the mentioned problems. A president elected in the proposed way will have favourable abilities to consolidate the Chechen people because the main factor of the Chechen tragedy – the split will be overcome.

Only then there will be real prospect of a conflict solution and return of our people to a peaceful life irrespective of which pretender will win at presidential elections.

Then plans for a solution of other problems, and for a reconstruction of Chechnya could be developed.

*Humit Paskushev is an influential Chechen leader now living in Moscow.*

*The interview was conducted by Alexej Klutschewsky in 2004.*