

OUR EXCLUSIVE

On the eve of the New Year, the former YUKOS head answers questions from *Sobesednik* and makes an address to all Russians at our request.

The court – an appendage of the “vertical”

– On December 3, Vladimir Putin spoke out about the YUKOS case. It was essentially understood from his words just what outcome he expects from the trial. Nevertheless, on December 12, you said in the British newspaper *Metro* that the premier no longer exerts any influence on the trial. Is there any evidence of this?

– Right now, answering that same question now that I know what Putin said, I shall express an opinion: if the premier needed to issue a directive to the court or to the investigators, he could (and can) do this far less publicly. Therefore, his declaration, without a doubt, is political. But there is also no doubt that it has a direct impact on all the structures that are built into the “vertical”. The reason is obvious – the awareness by interested parties in the premier’s retinue of the extent to which the current charge has completely collapsed.

Nevertheless, having learned all about our “legal” realities over the past 6 years, I maintain: if there were

Denis Yevsyukov, who shot and killed the patrons of a supermarket in the capital. He has now been put on trial, by the way. Do you see some kind of opportunities to transform the police, to force it to carry out its immediate functions with respect to protecting citizens?

– If even influential United Russians are coming out for the liquidation of the MVD, then what more can be said? It is obvious to everybody: the effectiveness of the control over this gigantic machine on the part of citizens and the law – is a dangerous illusion. At the same time, the police – are a reflection of our society. It is imperative to change the value system at the level of the ruling elites. Without this, any administrative steps, even the most radical ones, are not going to bring about a positive result. And also: without decisive changes in the judicial system, an attempt to reform the law-enforcement agencies is senseless. As long as the courts remain an assembly line for issuing guilty verdicts, our *siloviki* do not and will not have any incentive to respect the law and to comply with it unconditionally.

A political reform



Михаил
Ходорковский
Mikhail

unpleasant for me in the everyday-life sense.

Without a doubt, Dmitry Medvedev’s style in relation to independent media is different, but we are still light years away from real freedom of speech, and it is hardly likely that this astronomical distance can be overcome without all-round political reform.

The power, in my view, needs to understand: it is not just Khodorkovsky and a bunch of intellectuals who need freedom of speech; the whole country needs it. First and foremost the power itself, if it wants to mobilise the creative energy of the people in order to carry out that very same modernisation.

At liberty – more frightening

– In the 70s, those *zeks* who had done time in the zone for many years intentionally committed crimes in order to go back: they could not imagine life at liberty. In your “Maxims” you write that such a thing happens even now: 90% of prisoners are of no use to anybody “beyond the gates”, and if a person has done 10 years, he is already afraid of liberty. So where is it more frightening – in the zone or at liberty?

– It is a little bit frightening at liberty, because liberty – this is responsibility. And the burden of responsibility of a rational being is never very easy. Our people have lived in a “zone” for a long time. And they have not yet had the time to get used to real liberty, which implies bearing real responsibility for themselves. This is why a camp ration and some gruel seem to many to be a fair trade for not having to be responsible. But I believe that the situation will change. That we are not going to want to go back to the “zone”. That Russia deserves liberty.

What I would like to hear from the president...

– The president will soon be making his annual New Year’s address to the people. What do you expect to hear him say?

– From president Medvedev I would like to hear an admission that we were able to mitigate the social impact of the economic decline on account of the oil “cushion”, that we will be able to continue this work in 2010, but that once again we failed to lay the foundations for getting out of the crisis and into a modern economy, not one based on raw materials. An obstacle became the inertia of the bureaucracy, the archaic system of management and administration, and the indifference of society. We paid for this with hundreds of human lives in 2009.

I would like to hear some honest words about how, having tried to break corruption’s back, the president ran up against not only resistance on the part of officialdom and opposition on the part of some of the elites, but also the inertia of Russians, for whom it would seem that becoming true citizens of their country still lies in the future.

I would like to hear that he very much hopes for a profound shift in public sentiments in 2010 and will do everything that depends on him for this shift to occur. That having found himself in such a post by the will of fate, he does not intend to concern himself with somebody’s selfish interests and ambitions, or even with his own safety, but intends to serve Russia and awaits active support from

Russia deserves liberty

a direct command from him, they would have already convicted me of stealing all the oil in Russia – and the Tsar-cannon to boot.

– What is your reaction to the recent resignations in the Constitutional Court? Both of the judges – Kononov and Yaroslavtsev – essentially suffered for their critical interviews (one of these was printed in our newspaper) and “dissenting” opinions”. Can one really speak of any kind of “moving forward” in the reform of the judicial system in our country after this?

– The chairman of the Constitutional Court, Valery Zorkin, spoke openly about the situation in the court in a very self-critical piece published in *Rossiyskaya gazeta*. This was the first time he used such harsh characterisations: “waiter”, “whatever pleases your lordship”. And he essentially admitted that the court has turned into an appendage of the executive “vertical”.

It is clear that many of the generals of the judicial power do not want any transformations. They “get fed pretty decently as it is”. However, everything depends on the willingness and the readiness of the president to conduct such transformations. There is not going to be any truly modern Russia without a fundamental reform of the judiciary.

– The whole law enforcement system is in the same distressful situation. This became obvious to all after the incident with police major

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is needed!

– You have often said recently that political reforms are an imperative for an innovational economy (and practically all economists will agree with you here), as well as that the power has yet to adopt a decision in this regard. That is, in your view, does the power have to conduct political reforms in Russia voluntarily, or is a scenario possible where the trend of the development of the situation itself will force this to be done?

– We have all fallen into an extremely not-simple situation, which goes by the name of “the oil curse”. Thanks to oil incomes, the power is

able to either maintain social stability without modernisation approximately until the year 2015, or start modernisation, reducing the guaranteed period of social stability.

Such a situation is encountered in business. A typical example – AVTOVAZ. Either a trickle of outside social support and a slow slide towards the point of no return where it becomes easier to demolish than to modernise – or investments, modernisation, one-time costs and survival in a competitive marketplace.

Except that AVTOVAZ – is a comparably small system, capable of being managed “from without”, while Russia – is a huge system, and the transition that we need is to a modern

economy, and not to competition with China in the mass production of preserve tins. Our country is unsuitable for management “from without”. And even if “from without” – this is our own corrupt “vertical”. Political reforms are imperative. To behave otherwise is possible. But irresponsible.

– You’ve been published often this year in both Russian and foreign mass information media. Does this bear witness to the existence of some kind of freedom of speech or more likely to an address by the power to its service?

– In Russia I am permitted to address a narrow circle of intellectual elites, including through your newspaper. Attempts to severely restrict interaction with this part of our society and with foreign audiences turned out to be unproductive, albeit

society for the steps he is taking.

I am convinced: that part of Russian society which is capable of becoming a bulwark of modernisation is waiting for such words and deeds.

But the president's New Year's address – is a formal ritual, a background against which people pop open bottles of champagne and remove the covers from bowls of Olivier salad. It has nothing to do with politics, and therefore we will apparently not be hearing anything like this.

...and what I would say to Russians myself

– And what would your own New Year's address to Russians be like?

– Esteemed citizens of Russia, dear friends! We are living in an era of crisis, which for many of us is closely connected with big losses, material and otherwise. But the crisis opens up new opportunities for us as well. The time has come for us to understand that the oil-based free ride is coming to an end and that we, the citizens of Russia, have to change our country with our own hands and our own intellect. That we – are the masters of Russia, and its fate is up to us. There is no point in relying any more on handouts trickling down to us from above. We need to start to feel that we are free people, and to start moving forward. Only such a life is worthy of a human being. Happy New Year!

■ **Elena Skvortsova.**