

## VIP club



At a session of the VIP club Vice-Premier Sergei SHAKHRAI made several unexpected statements.

Tatyana SKOROBOGATKO,

Moscow News

The circumstances surrounding the removal of Shakhrai from the "Chechen problem" and his views on ways to solve the crisis aroused the greatest interest of the club members. The vice-premier remarked that the causes of his removal were "rather unclear." However, he pointed out that the neutrality of "corresponding federal structures" enabled Chechnya to become in three years an efficiently functioning "free economic zone" of obviously criminal character. He feels that Moscow bureaucrats are "fed" by people who made fortunes on Chechen oil. Therefore, Shakhrai maintains that it is very likely that Dzhokhar Dudayev frequently learns about what is happening in the government earlier than the Russia's premier.

According to Shakhrai, "extreme crime," continuing discord between political structures in Moscow, and the absence of civil institutions lead to the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies. He believes that today the likelihood of Russia turning into a police state is 70 percent. This can only be opposed by means of federalism which is understood as a "way of distributing political power vertically and horizontally." However, if the power is concentrated "within the Sadovoye Ring Road," then one needs only to carry out a coup in Moscow to make the whole country start "marching in another direction." In these conditions, with a certain balance of forces the police state may turn out to be the "lesser evil" and the only guarantee "against the state's general disintegration."

# Viktor Ilyushin: "The President Is Again in Fighting Trim"



Viktor ILYUSHIN, first assistant to the president of Russia, answers questions put by MN's analyst Vladimir ORLOV.

The president's administration is preparing for a staff reduction or rather for a new reorganization. What is this due to? And did this decision take you by surprise?

There was no surprise. I met with Sergei Filatov, head of the administration, on this matter and we compared notes. In particular, I expressed my considerations about the administration's performance in the belief that there was a need to set up a structure which would work to the utmost exactly for the president. I said that every action of any official in the administration must be appraised by one criterion: how useful it is for the president?

There are some who are trying to present the administration's reorganization as some arithmetic action. For my part, I maintain that it should be seen as the president's intention to make the work of his entourage more effective. Incidentally, during the time that the administration of the president of Russia has been in existence, reorganizations have been carried out in it on repeated occasions. This is a natural, normal process, and it is wrong to see any "sensations" in it.

And what scheme of reorganization is now in force: Filatov's or yours?

There are no differences between myself and Filatov. Whereas in February, when the first stage of reorganization was carried out, one variant seemed optimal to us, now, taking into account officialdom's unique capability to... on its own, we have arrived at this conclusion: we do indeed need to cut down the staff.

Will this affect presidential assistants?

I have suggested to Filatov: if the need arises, we are ready to comply with the president's demand insofar as it concerns the assistants and the chancellery (they are, after all, a single organism). Indeed, we are ready. But under one condition: the functions which we drop must be taken over by some other structure in the administration.

For the time being the number of assistants has been changed solely by way of increasing it.

How many assistants to have and what job they will do — this is up to the president to decide. To him and nobody else. As of today Boris Yeltsin has no more assistants than the presidents of other major states have. The total number of personnel employed as presidential assistants and the chancellery hardly reaches a hundred.

What is your attitude towards the fact that some assistants voice their recommendations to the president in public, through the press?

It has always been my position that the assistants to the president should appear more frequently in the mass media. But I am flatly against my colleagues acquiring a feeling that they are already independent political figures and can say whatever they like. No, I keep telling them, you must never forget that you work here insofar as the president trusts you and hopes that you share his position and his criteria. Of course, this is a delicate, intricate matter. Not everyone can be up to the teamwork, especially at the beginning. Apparently, it was not easy for every one of my colleagues to begin working in the capacity of assistant. The whole question is in whether or not adaptation passes quickly. Until now we have been able to help the president's assistants pass this stage rather quickly and achieve mutual understanding and teamwork as the result.

And still, there is no rivalry around who is the "first" and who the "second," is there?

If there is and can there be some rivalry here, it must not be known to the public at large. Let it be our internal affair. It is not worth putting in numbers — who is the first and who the second. But then again, I carefully track the different ratings of influence. Not because I do not trust them. Simply sometimes they make it possible to see someone's specific interests in advancing one or another person along the "scale of influence."

Will Vyacheslav Kostikov keep his post?

As far as I know, his departure is a foregone conclusion. And after some time Vyacheslav Kostikov will change his occupation. He had a talk with Boris Yeltsin. I know that their propensities coincided. Only one question remains: where will Kostikov go? A person who has worked with the president has a right to a worthy new job. It is only to be regretted that in numerous recent publications connected with Kostikov's likely departure there have been so many concoctions.

To avoid guesswork: is the resignation of the minister of defense to be expected in the immediate future?

I am not authorized to speak on the president's behalf, but I can say one thing. It is difficult for the president to become attached to people and to part with them.

Does this mean that the parting will be a long affair?

But will this parting take place?

Has the president and his closest entourage (you among them) been able of late, do you believe, to play an out-pacing game?

We are trying. Given the amount of analytical centers which operate in our administration, we are bound to anticipate any situations.

They say that a large amount of forecasting had been done before the question of the government's resignation was discussed in the Duma?

Indeed, we prepared our reply to each of the likely scenarios. We really came well-prepared to that sitting of the Duma. I can say this with pride.

What was your forecast of the voting?

I worked out the most pessimistic variant, even though I gave no accurate figures.

And the president?

He erred by a mere four votes. He said that 190 deputies would vote for the resignation, but the figure was 194.

Are you satisfied with the present-day mechanism of state decision-making in the Kremlin?

Our mechanism is not without faults. Its efficiency is still low, and we continue turning around the old, habitual orbits of work with documents. Every office-bearer pulls the blanket onto himself, not always does this happen here. What ensues is visits to each other... circles of coordinations... all this arouses irritation and

inflicts irreparable damage on the cause. I can now mention at least three excellent ideas which were offered to the president. But someone is impeding them by using red tape.

Name at least one.

For example, the idea of establishing benefits on poverty in Russia. The Commission on Social Welfare, working under the administration, long ago came forward with this idea: by a decision of the president to introduce a benefit on poverty for people whose income is below the minimum subsistence level. We can still find no way of pushing this question through. Why? Different interests have clashed.

Are assistants always in a position to try and persuade the president?

Always. Each of the assistants has a boundless opportunity to speak his mind to the president, moreover, directly. I see no hindrances, either for myself or for my colleagues.

Eighteen months to the next presidential elections is too long a time according to Russian yardsticks. I would not like to engage in guess-work. But the question remains: will Boris Yeltsin put forward his candidacy at the elections in June 1996?

This is still a forbidden theme in the president's closest entourage. Most likely, the president will turn to this theme at the beginning of 1995. But I cannot affirm even this. The question of Boris Yeltsin's participation in the next elections is not being discussed either among the aides or by the president.

At his request?

Right.

And what do you visualize your own political future to be like?

I have not yet thought about it. And I will tell you for sure: I do not know what I shall do after June 1996 if Boris Yeltsin does not remain the president of Russia.

What has delighted you the most during these past few weeks, and what has upset you?

Most of all I am delighted by the fact that by common effort with colleagues we have proposed a plan of action which the president liked and which, I believe, is being rather successfully implemented. The president is again in fighting trim, is active, vigorously responds to the assistants' proposals, and carries out activities with interest. What is distressing? You know, I am still an optimist and see nothing which could unsettle me.

THE FREEDOM FORUM  
FREE PRESS. FREE SPEECH. FREE SPIRIT.

"One of the main reasons why a free press is constitutionally protected is because it is essential to the democratic selection of our leaders."