

Police abuse in Blagovechensk and work of Rapid reaction commission as an example of Social control over police authorities in Russia.

On December 10, 2004 a special police team equipped with some automatic weapons for operations under enhanced dangerous and complex conditions was sent to the small Blagoveschensk Town, Bashkiria Region (Russia). All local policemen consisted of 130 staff members joined the above group.

During four days these masked policemen detained all male persons of the age from 14 to 50 years old, many of them have been severely beaten and located at the local police station along walls not allowing to move for a long period of time. As further journalists investigated and estimated those days about 1,500 male and female persons were illegally arrested with brutality. Not less than two hundred persons applied for required medical assistance.

It should be mentioned that the Bashkirian policemen were at war in Chechnya not once and were considered one of the most battle-worthy divisions of the Russian police. Their respective skills have been successfully used against peaceful people transforming this individual Russian town into some small "Chechnya" and showing off this Caucasian peaceful population being pressed by the Russian police system.

Two newspapers are published at the Blagoveschensk Town with population of 30,000. One of the newspapers is owned completely by local authorities at account of local budget. Its journalists have published no single lines related to the events as above except for some official police information. The second newspaper with circulation of 900 copies was run by some local businessmen. One must note that its editor fled from the town under these circumstances and its deputy, former school teacher Veronika Shahova was not frightened and made a photo report in the streets of the town.

During this process she was much threatened, the relevant digital pictures were eliminated by the special policemen, although this young lady managed

to make a special news issue on her own in practice. The local human rights activists have forwarded it via fax addressing to Yulia Latynina, famous Russian journalist who covered this story in her own program at the "Echo of Moscow", major democratic radio broadcasting station of Russia. Afterwards within a month a large interrogation material on the Blagoveschensk events was published by the "Novaya Gazeta", the leading national newspaper being in opposition. Upon such publications the authorities could not ignore the above events yet the Bashkirian police tried to deny all the facts by all means. The Bashkirian Prosecutor has initiated several tens criminal cases and a special interrogation group including investigators of the Russian General Prosecutor's Office has been formed (the unprecedented action as for the first time the General Prosecutor himself responded to the fact of infringement of the human rights). And today the Russian word Blagoveschensk became a symbol of the police terror actions against peaceful people.

I have deliberately started with this little prehistory so that to demonstrate **some real prerequisites being available in Russia for establishing actual and social system of control over police authorities**. Even at such complex region as Bashkiria and under terms of reducing our democratic rights and freedoms. The matter is that this Russian region is one of the most unfavorable in relation of observing human rights. Since Soviet period it has been ruled by Murtaza Rakhimov, Governor, not once showing its devotion to some authoritarian methods. These methods are realized by the relevant police organization with vast regional proxies as main presupposition of the events at Blagoveschensk. Although we consider a complete absence of the free mass media as the most important regional problem. Despite Russian legislation all Bashkirian mass media are subordinated to the local authorities somehow or otherwise. Any information via federal media channels and not suited for local authorities may be eliminated - the newspapers are not sold and Moscow TV programs are removed by local ones.

In other words, all signs of the totalitarian nation can be seen in Bashkiria (if not taking into account that this region is the Russian one). Nevertheless just a single splash of the free words in the kind of a private journalist interrogation made by provincial newsmaker Vera Shahova was quite enough for creating a Russian phenomenon named by the human rights' activists **some spontaneous and keen need realized by the members of society with purpose to establish Relevant Rigid Supervision Over Authorities' Activities" and police, in particular**. The regular and ordinary fact for the countries with stable democratic traditions is the essential event in Russia.

This implies that upon Blagoveschensk events and **for the first time in Russian history (we must emphasize this prime fact) the principal social and progressive powers appeared and put up as a United front**. Presumably it refers to some non-governmental entities protecting human rights in Russia, some leaders of the democratic movement and, certainly, journalist realm representatives. The most progressive Russian journalists joined the "Novaya Gazeta" publications and "Echo of Moscow" broadcasting issues. It must be said that such union became very efficient and fruitful one.

After Blagoveschensk events some famous Russian journalists established an informal Association called **"Rapid reaction Comission"** on the basis of the National anti-corruption committee and Indem Foundation performed respective coordinating and consulting functions. In particular, this Association has initiated performing special journalist interrogation procedures on facts available in the Tver Region (two cases of the mass police repressions against peaceful population), in Nefteyugansk Town (a case of the mass police tortures), interrogation procedures in the Sverdlovsk and Saratov Regions.

A certain working system must be regarded even at the first stage of actions. Some independent interrogations are made by journalists with reason

to evidence relevant facts of the human rights' infringement. The next step occurs with legal assessment and special report made by the human rights' activists and Moscow Helsinki group primarily. Indem Foundation and National Anti-corruption committee do inform the relevant authorities about such facts and promote an official dialogue between victims and authorities.

Particularly, in relation to all mentioned facts the Russian officials have been obliged (even not willingly) to react, and the Russian Prosecutor Office interrogates almost all facts as above. But here we must consider the most important problem (in our opinion) hindering effective social control over police activities.

Nowadays, under conditions of reducing some democratic institutions and human right for a free access to information the Russian police top officers are subordinated only to the central authorities directly. This means Russian President administration office. But for an operative social control system the respective dialogue with local authorities is quite essential as well as overcoming its resistance related to the problem of information access.

We see the decision of this problem in establishing some two-lateral communication channel with Kremlin officials even as some emergency channel. By no means it should be some comical Social Council under Russian President as absolute decorative and initially lifeless body. Also we can not be satisfied with practical work of the Russian Ombudsmen (Vladimir Lukin) and Presidential Assistant on Human rights (Ella Pamfilova) performing more and more some conciliatory functions between discontented society and authorities. The key issue that these structures are unable to request something from the authorities or in some cases they have no real instruments for it.

In contrast with those so-called "semi-social" structures we have already got a system of pressure onto authorities so that to obtain responding to our signals. We must add that now the most famous Russian journalists investigating respective facts of human rights' infringed by the authorities and

police do unite into the professional social organization named "**The Interrogative committee of the Russian journalists**" which must be used as a link within our supervision chain: the journalists-human rights' activists-social entities supervising directly over authorities (National anti-corruption committee and Indem). And the most important that our informal association does not depend on any authorities and so it may obtain the respective dialogue with authorities from the standpoint of the human rights protection, i.e. from the powerful position from the very beginning.

Thus, now our prime task is to force (namely so) authorities for obtaining constructive dialogue with us. In fact it is our principal conclusion upon the events at Blagoveschensk and upon experience of fighting with stagnant Russian police system which dislikes very much such word term as observing human rights.