

Belarus

Iryna Kashtalian interviewed **Stanislau Shushkevich**

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Kashtalian: I, Iryna Kashtalian, a historian from Minsk, am at the home [in Minsk] of Stanislav Stanislavavich Shushkevich [in Russian: Stanislav Stanislavovich Shushkevich], born on 15 December 1934 in Minsk. A Belarusian scientist and politician, a former people's deputy of the USSR, a deputy of the Republic of Belarus of the 12th-13th convocations, and an associate member of the National Academy of Sciences. He was the first state leader of independent Belarus, one of the signatories of the Belavezha Accords which legally formalised the dissolution of the USSR. And he is the son of Belarusian writer Stanislav Pyatrovich Shushkevich. Stanislav Stanislavavich, could you please describe your childhood?

Shushkevich: I can. Several episodes stand out in my mind. First, I remember myself at the age of two. Children usually can't remember anything from that age, but I do recall one episode, when in our little garden, here, on the outskirts of Minsk, a heated samovar tube fell onto my bare leg. I received a burn, I felt very unwell, and my grandfather sat me on his knees; I felt uncomfortable sitting on his knees as he wore high boots. And he said to me: "Just remember, when you have high boots, you will never burn your leg." It happened when I was two years old, and I remember it. And then, I remember myself around 1937-38-39 because my father was sent to Siberia. They decided, shall we say, that he was a political enemy of the Soviets although this was not the case.

And I corresponded with him in block capitals. I wrote letters, as my mother suggested, in Belarusian, and received letters from him, also in block capitals, in Belarusian, as I didn't recognise cursive letters at the age of four. That's how I remember my childhood, and then the war came. On the day the war started we weren't even worried since we were convinced that the USSR was the most powerful country, and my granny took me to Gorky Park where she even bought an ice cream, which didn't happen very often. She said they were bad for you. That is how I remember my childhood. And then, the occupation. Horrible crimes, atrocities were committed by the fascists here, in the territory of Belarus.

And finally, the liberation. I was still a child, and the liberation had a very good effect on me. I liked *Children's Newspaper* [in Belarusian: Dzitsyachaya gazeta], and, inspired by one of the news writers, I started writing newspaper articles. In 1946 I was given a great gift. When we didn't have enough bread and, in general, when we lacked everything here, I was sent to Artek [the most well-known pioneer children's camp in the USSR, located in the Crimea, now the territory of Ukraine], with everything being paid for since I was a "childcorr" [child correspondent] as they were called at the time. And there, for the first time in my life, I could eat bread in the canteen ad libitum, as much as I wanted. Although being in camp was fortunate I simply couldn't get accustomed to it since we used to have a lot of bread, comparable to today, but we were short of other food, apart from bread. And I saw that place [Artek]. These are the recollections of my childhood.

Kashtalian: And before your trip to Artek, before that journey, did you leave Minsk?

Shushkevich: I lived permanently in Minsk except New Year, turn of 41/42, when my mother sent me to the village where my grandfather, my father's father, lived. My father was confined in Siberia, and I lived in the countryside, at my grandpa's, for quite a while, since the food situation was better in rural areas. I could eat enough pancakes there. And then, after 1945, after the liberation, I also stayed in another village, named Kamen', Ilyanetski region, where most people spoke Polish. I learned to speak Polish quite well there.

Kashtalian: And that village was also connected to your grandparents?

Shushkevich: My mum's sister had a connection to the village. Her husband was also arrested but, unlike my father, he died, in transit to Magadan, somewhere there, during transportation. They received a document. My mother Helena and her sister Maryya were friends. They had relatives in the village, and I was sent there for summer, so to say, to have good nutrition, since it was worse with food here.

Kashtalian: When did it take place: during the war, in the post-war period? Did you often go to the country to visit relatives?

Shushkevich: I often went to the village and stayed there for several days, but I only stayed in Kamen for a month once, in 1945-1946. I stayed at my grandfather's here, in Shchytomyrychi, not far from Minsk. Now, as a matter of fact, it's 2km from the Ring Road, in the direction of Slutsk.

Kashtalian: What did you dream of when you were a child? How did you see your future?

Shushkevich: You know, I didn't dream of becoming a kind of reputable, respected man. I dreamt of not being the last among the other boys, and this sometimes came at a high price for me. Because when I intervened in some fight, my mother always believed that a man of good intent shouldn't start a fight regardless of whether the truth was on my side or not. And when I came home beaten up, she additionally scolded me for getting into a fight, and pointed to different male classmates as an example.

I forgot to mention that I didn't attend school during the occupation although it was required. I was already seven years old. I stayed at home, and was assigned straight to Year 4 immediately after the liberation, which I completed with a Certificate of Achievement. I didn't attend Year 1, 2, or 3. That is my childhood biography.

Kashtalian: And where did you live in Minsk at the time?

Shushkevich: We lived in Minsk; the site is now 200 metres from the Monument to Yakub Kolas. There, where the Philharmonic Hall is now. That's where our small old house with three flats was located. We lived in the first flat, and the second flat was at times empty, at times inhabited, as well as the third one. And after the war, those relatives from Kamen', Ilyanetski region, moved to those two flats.

Kashtalian: Would you, please, tell me: when you think of your identity, of belonging, do you think of a European identity, a Belarusian identity? For you, what does it mean to belong to something?

Shushkevich: That's a very complicated issue. My teacher, important for me, was my

granny, Frantsishka Rafaelauna Ramanouskaya, my mother's mother. She never received an education. She knew how to read and to write, however. She could read in Russian, Belarusian, and Polish since she prayed in Polish. She was a fanatical Catholic. She sincerely believed in God and wanted to bring me up as a Catholic. I can honestly say that she taught me to love people. She used to say that you might easily notice bad features in people, however it's more difficult to notice the good ones. You should look for the good ones and when you discover them, you would find a good man.

On the way, I achieved a lot, but I also made many mistakes, because at first I gave many people much more credit than they deserved. But I judged the majority correctly and had good relations with them.

Kashtalian: We are speaking about identity, belonging. Please, could you tell me, did you have different ideas in childhood about your identity in a world which changed over the course of time?

Shushkevich: There was almost no reflection upon who we were, Europeans or Asians. However, my granny thought that there were decent people, Christians, who believed in God, and she was also very well disposed towards Orthodox Christians. But she regarded someone who believed in God as a good man. She considered a man who regretted having committed a sin a good man.

She taught me this. And, you know, I had many interesting experiences. As a matter of fact, thanks to her, I learnt Polish quite well although my Belarusian family members didn't speak it. That is because she was a Catholic, and the Catholic faith was referred to as "Polish" at that time, since people prayed, and Roman Catholic priests preached in Polish. And she used to say: "If you learn a litany, I will give you 50 kopecks to go to the cinema". And I learned a lot of those litanies as I had a good memory. And did you know what happened when someone told a joke? When I gave lectures on nuclear electronics at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow in 1974, one man said the following: "You speak Polish well, however, as a matter of fact, you are not a Pole because you don't even know a *pacierz* [in Polish: prayer]."

And I started saying those "*pacierze*" one by one. (*laughs*) After that, we became friends. He was really shocked that I knew them. You know people were different at the time but I realised the difference between professors of humanities in Poland and in Belarus. I understood that there was a great difference. And I learned many interesting things in Krakow namely due to the fact that I knew the language, and I attended several speeches by Karol Wojtyła, future Pope John Paul II, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, in 1974. I even corresponded with him. I keep his letters, or, to be more precise, I kept his letters, and then I handed them over to the Belarusian archives.

And saying that we didn't identify ourselves as Europeans: I've always viewed myself as a European by birth. But I repeat once again that we identified ourselves as descendants of the citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania [a European state that lasted from the 13th century to 1795, when the territory was partitioned among the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Austria]. I got the idea, understood the history later. My mother was very unwilling to see me pursuing a career in the humanities, saying that it was better for me to deal with formulae, and even better – to better be a physician, than to deal with

humanities and to go to jail like my father. Therefore, I focused on physics and I chose it as my profession.

Kashtalian: And your grandmother was also from Minsk?

Shushkevich: My grandmother was born, as a matter of fact, within modern-day Minsk, in Navinki. But it was a village at the time; she was born in a village.

Her married name was Ramanouskaya. She had twelve children, nine of them reached adulthood. She told her Orthodox Christian husband that she would marry him if he converted to Catholicism and if they married at a Polish Roman Catholic church. And that's what happened. I can say that I have very faint recollections of my grandfather, I told you a story, when I was two years old. But it's a fact that me and my granny visited his grave at Kalvaryiskae cemetery every year. And my granny treated him with great respect; he died at the age of 60. It occurred at the age of over 60, in 1936 or in 1937 when I was two and a half years old, after that episode which I remember when I was sitting on his knees.

My granny always had very warm memories of him.

Kashtalian: And what about your parents: were they religious people?

Shushkevich: My parents were very Soviet people, and I think that they weren't religious but they had a positive attitude towards religion. It was impossible for the family to go against the mother's will since they had a strong faith in the Soviet order. And my mother wrote works, by the way, in Polish, because she was a member of one of those groups. As I was later told, there was a group of that kind intended to be implanted in the Polish-speaking milieu. She wrote in Polish, and my father wrote only in Belarusian, his attitude to Poles was strained. And they glorified the socialist system, they strongly believed in the socialist regime, and didn't consider it an impossible utopia.

My father renounced his views only short before his death. He used to say that it was a great idea, the idea of communism. Despite my efforts to change his mind, he used to say: "It's a great idea but since it's implemented by evil people, who wriggled into offices, became executioners, the system seems to be bad". And only at the end of his life did he see it the same way as I did.

Kashtalian: Please, tell me about your attitude towards religion? What do you think about it?

Shushkevich: I treat religious people with respect, with great respect. And, you know, I had contact with people of different religions. Very, very different. And it seems to me that many religions have an element of hatred.

I know Judaism, Islam, different Eastern religions of Japan and Korea in different interpretations. Buddhism. Religions are based on good principles. I'm convinced that those good principles for me have their origins from my grandmother. I got along with many Roman Catholic priests. When I gave lectures at the Jagiellonian University [in Krakow], I had a friend from a very religious environment, Adam Gancharouski. I told him a story about my grandfather, when in 1952 my grandfather, my father's father, invited me and my cousin. I was already a second-year university student. He said: "I will die soon". We said: "Grandpa, what are you saying?" "Keep silent, I will die. One of my sons

[Stanislavavich's father] is in prison, my second son, Vatsyk, was recruited to 'build communism'. Yanek is inert," he said half-joking. "But I want to be buried by a priest. And you, cousin Valya and me, have to do this. That's all. It's the only thing I ask you to do." He died three months later. It was in February 1952.

We gave him a burial with a priest, 14km from Minsk. In those times, if someone at the university had learned about my contacts with the priest to have him at the funeral, I would have been expelled. When I told my Polish colleague about this - he was a PhD student, I was a teacher - he said: "It's fantastic that you did it." And I replied: "You don't know the ending. At the end, that priest got drunk to a degree that made me take a very negative view of Orthodox Christianity since then." He responded: "You shouldn't be so harsh, that can happen with anyone, but if you see a drunken Polish Roman Catholic priest or a Polish nun, this will mean that Poland is dead." Since then, I kept watching Polish Roman Catholic priests, monks and Polish clergy, and I have never seen a drunken one, one dressed untidily, drinking, even one with a neutral attitude towards alcoholic drinks. Hence, my attitude towards religion – respect.

Shushkevich's wife [from another room]: And what about paedophiles?

Shushkevich: She is aware of those paedophilic Catholic stories with some priests.

Shushkevich's wife: I'm simply sick and tired of this story. And how should Catholic paedophiles be dealt with?

Shushkevich: This is the case when I say that my wife is the most harmful person among the harmful ones (*laughs*). Meddles, meddles in my affairs. But this is not bad; if it were any different, it would be sad.

Kashtalian: You worked in the system, you had certain beliefs. Let me make sure I've got this right: traditional things were more important to you than the official ones?

Shushkevich: Indeed, in private, but officially, if I had announced myself to be a Christian, I wouldn't have ever become either a candidate of sciences or a professor. That was the reality then. One had to keep this secret. So it was, and it worked out. I got into the cohort of those who gave lectures abroad - due to the fact that my report was accepted for an international conference in Yugoslavia, in Ljubljana.

I always treated religious people with respect. And I didn't like "poseurs". I think that there were many, many people of that kind. When answering the questions of historical sciences and the questions in social sciences, I said what I was required to say. Because if I had said anything different my career would have ended. I graduated from the night school Marxism-Leninism University twice with excellent marks. These decennial training units were mandatory for everybody. I never got a "Good" ["4" in the Soviet educational system] in social sciences, only an "Excellent" ["5" in the Soviet educational system]. Although I sometimes had "Good" in physics and mathematics.

Kashtalian: You said that your parents advised you not to become a specialist in humanities?

Shushkevich: Not my parents but my mother, as I didn't see my father. My father was far away. And to discuss the matter in a letter? Letters were monitored. That's why it was my mother. She knew that my father was not guilty, and that he was wrongly accused of

Trotskyism.

Kashtalian: You say that you did well at the Marxism-Leninism school but what about social sciences? It seems to me that your thirst for these sciences manifested itself there.

Shushkevich: Not so much. I had to study there to upgrade my qualification. It wasn't my wish to attend that night school university. They said: "You graduated from university ten years ago, and you need to upgrade your qualifications". The whole Marxist science, in particular, political science, was narrowed down for me to: "I control and you obey. To stick to a plan at any cost." That's all. A different Marxism doesn't exist. And now, as a matter of fact, our president Lukashenka [Alyaksandr Lukashenka or Alexander Lukashenko in Russian, born in 1954, acting President of Belarus (since 1994)] proceeds like this. He doesn't use other means to govern the country; he thinks that it's all about the people. As for the economic system, he is an absolutely uneducated person, and doesn't improve his knowledge.

Kashtalian: Did you regret choosing physics?

Shushkevich: You know, I don't regret it. I like physics, and sciences in general. My profession is to be a university teacher. And I'm proud to have given lectures at the invitation of the world's top universities. Is there another man in Belarus who was invited four times by America's Harvard University to give lectures? Is there another man who was invited to the USA by Yale University, American University and other high ranked universities? Could you name someone who was invited to Britain by Oxford and Cambridge, not to mention those nearby?

Granny would have been very proud to know that I was awarded the degree of "doctor honoris causa" [a higher doctorate degree without defence of a thesis which is conferred due to the applicant's important achievements in sciences or in culture] at a catholic university in Lublin. And my friends are proud to know that I was awarded the degree of "doctor honoris causa" by the School of Economics or Szkoła Główna Handlowa in Poland. I was twice awarded the degree of "doctor honoris causa"; a Certificate of Achievement is something crooked there, in Korea and on the East, on the whole.

I was on a lecture tour for example, in Japan; I gave seven lectures there. Those were my highest earnings, the highest compared to other countries. When I arrived, I gave wide-scale lectures. I learned later that people purchased tickets to attend them, there was some advertising. I was so well remunerated that when I came back, I bought a new Japanese car for my wife.

Kashtalian: And when did you start to go on lecture tours? After 1991 or earlier?

Shushkevich: There was something along those lines. The head of my department made me submit a paper to Yugoslavia, for Colloque Ampère, to translate it into English and to draw up documents to acknowledge that it didn't contain any secret information. I made every effort to get out of it, however he was quite a stern man. He said: "Prepare it, and that's that!", and I prepared it. Surprisingly, my paper was admitted, and I received a letter on the matter. And they also sent me my published theses before the presentation.

But I wasn't included in the delegation. Only scientists from Leningrad and Moscow were included. My rector complained to minister Elyutsin (Viachaslau Elyutsin (1907 - 1993) –

Minister of Higher Education of the USSR (1954-1959), Minister of Higher and Secondary Vocational Education of the USSR (1959-1985), and they sent me to give lectures on an exchange programme. Since it was very embarrassing: the delegation was going, my paper was included. That's how I happened to be in Yugoslavia, in Ljubljana at the time, to give lectures at the University of Ljubljana. Several lectures. By the way, not to students because there were no students. Many things amazed me. But as for the form, it complied with the Soviet rules. I performed well there... I spoke well of the Soviet order as required... as in Vysotski's [Vladimir Semyonovich Vysotsky 1938-1980, a Soviet singer-songwriter, poet, and actor whose career had an immense and enduring effect on Soviet culture] songs. I did what I was required to do. That first tour was a success. Then I was also asked to give lectures in Poland. They said that they were to be given in English or in Polish. It was very convenient for me to give them in Polish. And I gave them. As for the other lecture tours, I gave lectures in Russian, except that I gave them in Belarusian for the Belarusian expatriate community (diaspora) in the USA.

Kashtalian: And that first visit to Yugoslavia, when was that?

Shushkevich: In 1966.

Kashtalian: As far as I know you know a few foreign languages.

Shushkevich: With defects. I had quite a good command of German, at a quite acceptable level, but not enough to give lectures in it. And I didn't. I was invited by the University of Jena (Carl Zeiss Jena) three times to give lectures on nuclear electronics.

I was invited by Krakow and Ljubljana Universities. And three times by a German university. Those were my stays abroad in the days of the Soviet Union.

Kashtalian: In the Soviet period. That trip to Yugoslavia - was it your first trip abroad?

Shushkevich: Yes, it was. I got tired, preparing all those documents, my biography, a notebook in three copies, handwritten, and so on. It was very difficult to go abroad but I got through everything, and my first trip took place.

Kashtalian: Did the fact that you were a son of a repressed person hinder you?

Shushkevich: You are right. I didn't write about this. When I applied to enter the university, I had a medal, and it was difficult not to accept me. I wrote "My father doesn't live with the family" [quotes in Russian] in my application. I was asked to provide explanations but my mother instructed me: "No explanations! Your father doesn't live with us, and that's all! Exactly that!"

So that's what I said, and I was admitted to the university. Chymburg, rector of the university, even took revenge on me for this. For example, I rode a motorcycle well, after the first year, and I took second place in a rally. He barred me from the Minsk-Kiev cross-country motorcycle race. To say nothing of other things. Then a new rector was appointed in my third year, Lukashou, a true scientist. Chymburg wrote articles for Tsanava [Laurensiy Tsanava (1900-1955), People's Commissar of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the BSSR (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) (1938-1941), People's Commissar (from 1946-minister) for State Security of the BSSR (February-June, 1941, 1943-1951), Deputy Minister for State Security of the USSR (1951-1952)]. He wrote a book for Tsanava although he was designated as an editor. You know, Tsanava was a

KGB [Committee for State Security, a central body for state security in the USSR in 1954-1991] despot in Belarus. When a new rector was appointed, my father's conviction was removed from the official records due to a lack of evidence. From then on, I was a normal person, and could advance and develop as an individual.

Kashtalian: When was your father rehabilitated?

Shushkevich: His imprisonment ended in 1948 for the first time, and he came here. But four months later, he was prohibited from residing in Minsk, and he worked as a teacher of the Belarusian language in Danilavicy, Dzyarzhynsk region. Then he was imprisoned once again, rehabilitated in 1953, and came back to Minsk in 1956. He already had a new family there, in Siberia.

Kashtalian: But you were in contact with your father afterwards?

Shushkevich: All the time. I received the first letter after the liberation of Minsk, 10-11 days after the liberation of Minsk. My father sent the letter to the old address, and I received it.

Kashtalian: Please, tell me about the traditions in your family, in your parents' family, which you, probably, brought into your own family?

Shushkevich: I think that my mother was an outstanding teacher. She was a highly respectable person among those not very adequate young people, students, fellows, mainly among male fellows, not among girls, in Kamarouka where we lived at the time. She wouldn't teach me to do something. But she used to say: "Look at Haryk! He is always neat, tidy while you always get dirty whatever you wear. Take him for an example! Haryk, unlike you, learns everything, and he will be awarded a medal. And you will not be awarded a medal since you are an idler". I hated Haryk but afterwards we became good friends.

We stayed in contact till now; he died not long ago. You know my mother was a superb teacher, and it was logical that she made me the person I am. I couldn't stand a lot of people since my mother used to point to them as an example. But I obeyed and behaved well somehow. You know, it wasn't easy to be awarded a medal. There were only two medals in my class. Abramza Turenski who is, fortunately, alive in the USA and whom I visited four times there... Under such conditions. We received these awards, and I entered the university I chose. However, I had a Russian language teacher, and when she knew that I was admitted to study physics, she said: "Holy God! But it's awful, it's awful. You've chosen a path of an insensate science." [switches to Russian] Why do those, who understand Homer, Archimedes, and others, choose physics. They do not choose humanities although they are the most fundamental for humanity". She was sincere. She had a good opinion of me. And do you know what supported this opinion? She was quite a hysterical teacher but she was committed to the Russian language. [switches to Belarusian] For example, she told us to learn a poem by heart for the next lesson, named "Death of the Poet" [Mikhail Lermontov's poem]. It so happened that the next lesson was the day after. Almost no one learned it by heart apart from me. I can recite that Lermontov poem even now. And in our class, almost everyone got "Unsatisfactory" ["2" in the Soviet educational system], several "Satisfactory" ["3" in the Soviet educational system], and I got "Excellent" ["5" in the Soviet educational system].

And guess, what? My classmates and me got together recently. We get together now as well, those who remain alive. Now there are only three or four left of us. They said: "We beat you up not for the fact that you learned the poem better than we did, but because you also learned the epigraph by heart." The epigraph was missing in the school textbook. But my mother gave it to me to read. She was a teacher of Russian language and literature at the time. She gave it to me to read, and as I recall [quotes in Russian]:

Revenge, the Emperor, revenge!

I will fall at your feet:

Be just and punish the murderer,

That his sentence in the next century

Heralded to offspring your right court,

And that the villains will see example in it.

The academy's publication of this poem "Death of the Poet" had an epigraph. And they said: "We beat you up because you, on top of that, got that epigraph out of nowhere." That's how it was.

Kashtalian: Please, tell me, what did you learn at school? What was the most significant for you in the context of knowledge, experiences, that you acquired at school?

Shushkevich: I learned to have respect for my teachers. I didn't have bad teachers at school. Today, when I communicate with certain teachers, I see that very few people have reached the level of my teachers. My teachers were superb. Notwithstanding the fact that different things happened, which weren't very good. We played jokes on those teachers, did bad deeds and good ones. For example, Komar Uladzimir Mikalaevich, a teacher of the Belarusian language, liked to drink alcohol, and arrived drunk for classes. However, he was a very friendly person.

He said: "We will continue reading "Novaya zyamlya" [Yakub Kolas' "New Land"] today. Get up, Shushkevich, and read". I took a seat and continued reading "Novaya zyamlya" (*laughs*) in Belarusian, and the whole class did whatever they liked. I attended school with Russian as the language of instruction, an all-boys school. I started to study at a school with Belarusian as the language of instruction; it was the nineteenth school where my mother worked as a teacher. But several days later, she said: "You should change school. I was asked how to work with students if I can't restrain my own son. You should change school". And she sent me to attend another school. And there (it was Year 4), at once, there was a superb teacher, Maltsava Tatsiana Kanstantynauna. We all liked her. The whole class, overage children mostly. Excellent. And afterwards, the teachers were superb. And I keep this in mind in relation to the school.

Kashtalian: It turns out that you were an outstanding student for your teachers but your mother treated you as a wild child? Or was it her pedagogical method?

Shushkevich: You know, different things happened. And if there hadn't been some fortunate coincidences things could have ended badly. After the fourth year which I completed with a Certificate of Achievement, I was admitted to the fifth year where different teachers taught different subjects. It was great fun to skip a lesson. To play

mayalka [an alternative name for a game of tag] or to wander for a while somewhere. I skipped lessons, and from an student with honours in the fourth year, I almost became a low-performing student in the fifth one. Then, all of sudden, I was invited to the editorial office of the newspaper *Zorka* [in Belarusian: “Star”]. It was named that later; at the time, its name was *Piyaner Belarusi* [in Russian: “Belarusian pioneer”; starts quoting in Russian language] “It was decided to reward you due to the activities of a “childcorr”, said Anastasiya Fiyaktystauna Mazurava, who was the newspaper editor.

“We’ve decided to send you to Artek. There were four children camp vouchers for Belarus. Children from children’s homes were listed separately. I hope your academic performance is the same?” she asked me. As a matter of fact, everything was complicated with my studies. It happened in late March. I said, lying: “Yes, the same”. That’s all of it. Two days later we were to leave in a separate passenger carriage. We were required to submit cards, , to get some certificates and references. I did all this and left. And there! There was a school in the camp. That was around April, May. There, I performed well. And when I came back, I was, surprisingly for all the teachers, almost an exemplary student. Since then, I haven’t had any problems in my studies. Never, nowhere, not at all.

Kashtalian: Can we understand it as the moment of your growing up?

Shushkevich: If I had got out of hand I think my mother would have restrained me, she would have found the way to bring me back to the straight and narrow. When she said later that I wouldn’t be awarded a medal, I got mad. I didn’t like to be among the laggards. I think that my mother simply didn’t pay much attention to the fact that I became a low-performing student. But Artek helped to set things right.

Kashtalian: And you were the only child in your family?

Shushkevich: No, I wasn’t. I also have a sister. To be more precise, we have one mother. My sister’s name is Ira. She is the closest person to me.

She had heart problems all through her life, and died unexpectedly at the funeral of my cousin Viktor. We had many tragedies here. 10 days later after a road traffic accident with my daughter, who smashed bodily out the window of a shuttle bus while travelling from Minsk to Lyntupy. So, not everything is going well. In 2013, if I had sought medical attention due to heart problems in due time, I would feel better now; not as weak as I feel.

Kashtalian: Just to be clear, please, tell me: did your father bring his second family here?

Shushkevich: He brought them afterwards. I’ll show you now the jokes we face.

This document [he shows a video that contains the song with the poem of his father]. My dad’s poem is set to music and we must acknowledge that we do not claim remuneration for his memory. There is a man who composed a piece of music. We say that he needs to be paid for this. You see, all my sisters signed an agreement for the right to use the poem of their father. They are Shushkevich by birth: Nadzeya Stanislavauna, Galina Stanislavauna, Razaliya Stanislavauna, Leanid Stanislavavich, and me. We disclaim our interest in this. The interest which we have as legitimate heirs for that man who composed good music and wrote excellent songs, based on our father’s poems. We specify that it’s his achievement and he should be paid for everything. We get along with each other well. I will sign all this. Lawyers require the remuneration to be paid to him. We will do all this.

We are a tightly knit family, all the Shushkeviches.

We are in contact, we get together, that way. The second family? I can't blame my father for the fact that he started a new family since in general I don't know whether he could return alive or not. His new wife, Ekatsyaryna Alyakseuna, was a wonderful woman, Ukrainian. My wife is Russian. All my paternal brothers and sisters: their mother is Ukrainian, and father – Belarusian.

Kashtalian: Very interesting. Please, tell me, did your mother start a new family?

Shushkevich: In fact, my mum didn't have another family. She started it, gave birth to a daughter, and afterwards the family failed. There were attempts to create it, however nothing worked out.

Kashtalian: Let's get back to school. Did you have subjects in which you were sceptical about the things your teachers told you?

Shushkevich: We didn't have such subjects. We didn't have social science, in primary school. We had history, and, you know, I was convinced that the Soviet interpretation of history was the truest in the world. A teacher in history was the head teacher of our class. A wonderful woman, Stanislava Mikhaylauna Petrushkevich. We called her "Stesya Markauna" for fun amongst ourselves. She managed to present the subject in the form we liked. But I will give an example for you to understand what our class was like. We thought of a present for her for the 8th of March [a holiday in Belarus since Soviet times on which women usually get presents and flowers]. And you know what we chose as a present? A book subscription for Uladzimir Il'ich Lenin. 17 volumes had been published at the time, and we gave her that and also attached a subscription for further editions. Those books were the cheapest and the best-looking books.

It was our class. It was a kind of Soviet class.

Kashtalian: Did she appreciate it?

Shushkevich: She was very grateful, and all she said was: "You spent so much - why?" But we were pleased that we had given her this gift. It was an anniversary edition. This was the only present to our head teacher, and we remembered it until recently. Unfortunately, later on I was always abroad: when our head teacher died, when our classmates died, I didn't manage to attend any of the funerals apart from the last one. Garyk Shyfryn died before New Year; he lived in Minsk, here, in the vicinity. By the way, he was a Jew who passed himself off as an Armenian. As a matter of fact, he survived thanks to my Slyapyanskaya Street.

I wrote about this in my book. It was even published in several editions.

Kashtalian: Do you mean your biography which was published in Moscow first?

Shushkevich: It was published in Moscow first, then in Vilnius in Belarusian, translated by me. Then it was published in Polish, and I was in contact at the time with an excellent editor and an excellent translator. I translated it into Belarusian myself, I wrote it in Russian due to the possibility to get it published. A version in Belarusian was published in Vilnius. It was also published in Estonian. Then I prepared it for publication when I was in London: I was asked to adapt my book for English-speaking readers.

I was even paid a royalty for this. I adapted it, however the company went bankrupt, and for that reason, I published it in Russian. I used that part [that was prepared for the English translation of the book] which was suggested to me by that company, a Russian company, by the way. And they had no objections. That's why the book is titled *The Collapse and Resurrection of the Soviet Union: 25 Years Later*. I can show you the books. I have all of them at home.

Kashtalian: You've touched on the subject of the war that your friend survived. However was it common in your family to talk about wartime experiences and to what extent can you recall what happened?

Shushkevich: I would say that we didn't talk about politics in our family. We didn't talk about it, and that's all.

My granny used to say [speaks with a Polish accent] that it was better during the old regime since my grandfather was a railwayman, a conductor. In conversation, my granny corrected for "oberconductor". He earned a good salary, enough to live well. He stayed in the last wagon of a freight train. Once the wagons detached, a part of them, grandpa ran towards the approaching train, and stopped it with his rod. And he was given a watch, awarded only to drivers – "Buhre" - a Swiss watch. It was the most significant loss for our family when my granny exchanged it for bread, or, for lard or salt pork during the war, during the occupation, since we were suffering from hunger, and she couldn't let us starve.

Kashtalian: How did the family manage to survive during the war?

Shushkevich: We had a little garden here, now I reckon, of 20 x 20 metres. It's quite a big plot. We always had our own potatoes. Our own cucumbers, cabbage, carrots, beetroot, and we always raised two goats too. We raised them here where there the Philharmonic Hall is now. And from time to time we had a pig. We lived like people in the country. So the fire [during the beginning of the war, when Minsk was on fire] didn't reach us since the wind changed; six houses separated our house from the affected area. We tried to escape from the Nazis, from the occupiers, but the path was blocked by the German forces, and we had to return to Minsk.

That's how we found ourselves trapped in the occupation in Minsk, and our house, fortunately, wasn't destroyed by fire.

Kashtalian: Do you remember the Nazis?

Shushkevich: Oh! And how! I do remember them well due to the horrible things here. And I remember how scared people were, and how some greeted the Nazis, enthusiastically, with flowers. I don't want to talk about that. I even remember surnames, and those people are still in my memory. Now, in order for their family members not to get into trouble since it was a disgrace, a shame, I will not mention the names of the people who welcomed the Nazis. As for our street, my street, Slyapyanskaya Street: when the Nazis established a ghetto, several families moved there from those who were relocated to the ghetto. An Armenian woman moved to us, Shyfryn by surname. She had three children: Haryk, Zhenya and Roza.

All of them were "Armenians". Everybody knew that they were Jews. No one on this

street... In spite of the threat being shot since it was required to inform on Jews under the threat of being shot for failing to do so. One issue. If you gave them away, they would be shot. So, Haryk mainly lived at our home. I can show on my screen saver. Haryk and I look back on this quite frequently. He is well aware of my book where I talk about him.

Kashtalian: Did you live near the radio manufacturing plant?

Shushkevich: I did. Our street was named "Slyapyanskaya Street". It ran farther, the plant was located to the left, and the plant canteen entrance was on Slyapyanskaya Street. I remember that when I got, I don't know how, 5 kopecks, I hurried to the radio manufacturing plant canteen to buy a tasty "zhur" [in Belarusian: Kissel, traditional drink from berries] for 5 kopecks and to eat it; these memories are my most pleasant childhood memories.

Kashtalian: I'm clarifying since the so-called small ghetto was reportedly located in the territory of the radio manufacturing plant where Jews, skilled Jews, worked. Do you know anything about this?

Shushkevich.: I'm sorry but it is not true. Jews didn't work in the territory of the radio manufacturing plant during the occupation. There were no Jews there. Except for the fact that that plant was originally Jewish since it was relocated from Vilnius to Minsk. Many Jews worked there. However, they left collectively, fleeing the occupation, or died here when they were in the territory of the ghetto. I worked at the plant afterwards. After my doctoral studies, I felt uncomfortable working there; I describe the events in the book. I worked at that radio manufacturing plant, which was relocated to Krasnaya Street. And I should say that I learned much from many Jews who didn't have any special education, from self-learners; I learned more from them than from my doctoral studies.

I worked there for a year, did a lot, but I got immersed (*sighs*). I was lured away by the university which also provided me with good conditions. So I left for the university, and since then, I have been a university staff member.

Kashtalian: Please tell me, returning to school: what do you recall about your history and geography lessons? What countries, peculiarities did you study?

Shushkevich: The best-hated teacher who hated me and whom I hated, was a teacher of geography, Vinogradova. It was difficult for me to get a medal since she gave me "Good" as my mark for the year. She was the only teacher who for some unknown reason really disliked me. Maybe, due to the fact that her son was a radio amateur, a very bad one.

We didn't accept him, there, at school. The first radio centre at school: I mostly arranged it on my own as a radio amateur. The teacher of history was the polar opposite. But we studied geography according to the textbook on geography. It was a standard one. Countries of the world, nature. History was also according to the textbook. I didn't use other sources. As for literature, for example, I had an opportunity to read. My mother prohibited me from reading *War and Peace* in excerpts, she made me read the full version. Besides, I should say that I didn't want to read *War and Peace*. But my mother thought that I would grow up into a lout if I didn't learn it. Such were the conditions.

And I repeat, they were good teachers. The geography teacher was also a rather good

one. She was from Warsaw, moved to Minsk; a Jew. She disliked me for an unknown reason. I had an annual “Good” in geography but all the teachers, including her, insisted that I retake. I retook for “Excellent”, starting Year 10, so my academic performance qualified for a medal.

Kashtalian: When you were taught geography, history, did you agree with the information or did you suspect that there were different views and interpretations of history?

Shushkevich: You know we didn’t have time to disagree. I had other interests.

Kashtalian: Was Stalin still alive when you studied?

Shushkevich: Stalin was alive, and it seemed perfectly good that he existed. My father considered his own imprisonment a mistake. It was interpreted somehow, and the interpretations that differed were prohibited. I can say that I wasn’t among those who colluded, denounced the actions of the Soviet regime. The propaganda was so proficient that I didn’t have the grounds to protest against this, at least, at school. At the university the situation was different. There was more access at the university, I started to get an understanding of writers, poets, events in Hungary, events in other countries. And that justice doesn’t exist. But capitalism seemed to be a very bad system.

They said we would have been living in paradise if it weren’t for the capitalist encirclement. That kind of propaganda was broadcast every day, via a radio receiving station. These are the propaganda techniques. I wasn’t an anti-Soviet person at school, not at all. Deep inside, I was an anti-Soviet person when I was a university student - but only deep inside, due to propaganda. People sometimes mocked Brezhnev [a Soviet politician who led the Soviet Union as General Secretary of the governing Communist Party (1964–1982)], and others. We saw a rift in the clouds only when “perestroika” started.

Kashtalian: In your opinion what sources of information had the greatest impact on you? On those changes?

Shushkevich: “Voice of America” [the Russian-language division of the respective radio station which started broadcasting in 1947; one of the information sources about events in the USSR and in the world].

Kashtalian: Did you listen to “Voice of America”?

Shushkevich: It was difficult to listen to it but we listened. I dealt with radioelectronics, and we knew how to listen to “Voice of America”. At the end of my career at the university, we even knew how to watch satellite TV broadcasts.

I had a very talented student, Slava Danilau, who made a receiver for satellite TV broadcasts on a university machine. And, besides, I travelled abroad!

Kashtalian: Was that after 1966?

Shushkevich: I went abroad in 1966. I was on a lecture exchange program. I was paid a professor’s salary. The terms were the following: I was to be paid a professor’s salary, and to be reimbursed for the round-trip travel costs and a student hotel; a doctoral student room was free of charge. When I received the money... I had never had such sums. You could have bought furniture for a two-room apartment for that monthly professor’s salary.

I decided: No, I will not be a money squanderer. I will not buy clothes, so I used the money

to travel around Yugoslavia. I had a very good knowledge of Yugoslavia. I visited all the republics, the coastline. I was indignant about the bombings of Belgrade. Then I learned what occurred in Croatia; those places were holy sites for me, I liked the people there. And I liked the situation there which was much better than in the USSR. At this point, I didn't support the forces that acted against Yugoslavia.

Kashtalian: And did you manage to travel around Yugoslavia at that time, in 1966?

Shushkevich: The following happened in 1966: I had to give several lectures within the scope of the exchange program. You are the first person to whom I will say that I gave only three lectures while I was assigned there for a month. However, there was Jozef Stefan, rector, and it was a pleasure for me to attend the scientific workshop there. I got a feeling of freedom of teaching there. The workshop was to be at 10 o'clock in the morning. Coffee. Bottles of wine! If somebody wanted to drink something - Holy God! I was even afraid to approach and didn't say anything about drinking since I knew that someone kept watch on me. Since someone kept me under observation, they had to report. I didn't approach those things. I was very, very careful. There were a lot of amazing things. For example, a bottle of orangeade which cost more than a wine bottle.

It was simply non-comparable to Soviet standards. One could drink and party. I didn't allow myself to do this. And then. Then I thought about what people would think if I bought different stuff to wear and brought it to the USSR. It would be shameful. Me, a teacher, coming back like that. And I decided to use the money there. I don't remember the name of that tour around Yugoslavia right now; "Kompas" if I recall correctly. I had a flat, and there was a certain bewilderment. I noticed there that our history which we were taught here, had no connections with the history taught in Europe. For example, out of my window, from the student hotel, I saw [Maurice] Couve de Murville, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, who came and laid floral tributes at the Monument of Napoleon.

To my understanding, Napoleon was an enemy; Patriotic War, and so on. But everything had a different perspective. I understood that I had heard earlier that 70% of the Belarusians had supported Napoleon according to some sources. I asked them: "Why do you do this with Napoleon?" "Napoleon made a superb statement. He said that Illyria deserved to be a state." Illyria is Slovenia, in fact. And many other things. I should say that I was a fool to some extent since I complied with the rules, went with the instructions. For example, I was invited there to visit Zagreb in Croatia. However, it was a diversion from my plan, from my project.

I scheduled each day, and if I went off-plan, I had to call the embassy to get approval. So I called the embassy. At the embassy, nobody wanted to take responsibility; I understood this later, and I understood that my plan would be disrupted. They said: "Absolutely not!" I regret very much that I failed to get acquainted with many things there. Already within the package tour which I purchased, I was taken to Zagreb, Novi Sad, Rijeka, Dubrovnik, Lake Bled. These places are miracles, and I had enough money for everything, to travel at my own expense from the sum I was paid. Then I understood the difference in the payment for the work of a teacher in Ljubljana and in Belarus.

Kashtalian: Did you already have a family at that time?

Shushkevich: Yes, of course! I'm married, in my second marriage. I have a daughter,

who as I said got into a road traffic accident, from my first marriage.

We've lived together for 43 years already. She is my former student, and, thus, she has a lot of liberties.

Kashtalian: The first foreigners you saw probably were the Germans during the war? In my understanding.

Shushkevich: Yes. The Germans, and there were also foreign university students. But during the war, there were Germans. You are right. I can say that there were very hard conditions here. For example, a mine blew up in the first tram car. Nobody was injured, nobody died; it was a German tram car. Everyone died in the second one. However, they captured several people and said that they were shot. That was their approach.

Then, terrible memories, when I recall how they went, and hanged that young woman. "They shot at German soldiers". You know those recollections are terrible. Terrible. I don't want to look back on this.

Kashtalian: And looking back at foreign university students. How do you remember them?

Shushkevich: They were very different. For example, in 1982 when I was already head of the department, 17 Cuban students graduated. Most of them graduated from my department of nuclear physics; they were awarded honours diplomas. I have never met a group of such talented students who worked so hard. There is a different story about Vietnamese students, in particular those who went through the war and for their service were sent here for studies:

They didn't have the necessary background to study at the university. All my department staff did their best to teach them to the extent that was possible. We hadn't seen such diligent and such meek, suppressed people before. Their best present was a ring with the number of a shot-down aircraft, made out of aluminium from that aircraft. My and my wife often look back on those times. Not in this flat, I had another one, a small one at the time. A Vietnamese intern came to visit us, and we discussed how they lived in Vietnam. He said: bad, not bad, but we live. We started to count what he could afford to buy for his salary. He could afford to buy two pounds of meat for his monthly salary.

Kashtalian: Which language did you use to communicate?

Shushkevich: Usually Russian. However, when I happened to stay with Germans who didn't know Russian, I could explain in German since I studied German at school and at university. Apparently, everything could have gone well and I could have had a good knowledge of the language, but my scientific adviser in doctoral studies said that English was definitely needed. So I took an examination in English during my doctoral studies, and I passed it with "Excellent". But I can only translate texts, and only printed texts. I have difficulty understanding oral English. My granddaughter, my son, my wife laugh at me. They know English well. I need a printed English text, and then I can translate it.

We weren't taught to speak. They said: "You don't need this, you are researchers, you need to translate." I always explain that I learned English the Soviet way.

Kashtalian: How did you communicate with Oswald [Lee Harvey Oswald (1939 - 1963) – the only recognised alleged assassin of American President John Kennedy. He lived in

the USSR for a while (October, 1959-June, 1962)?

Shushkevich: You should know that I was a non-party man at that time at the plant. A secretary of the plant department Communist Party committee came and said that it was an order of the Party. A great trust! I was never left alone (one-on-one) with him. He knew Russian quite well. Me and [my colleague] Valodzya Rubenchik polished up his Russian.

I don't even know the exact number of lessons we had. There were more than five lessons, that's for sure. And less than ten, that's also for sure. But I don't know the exact number. I liked him, and I'm absolutely sure that it wasn't him [who killed Kennedy]. My wife and I visited the place of Kennedy's murder, Dallas. I was often invited by universities in the USA, and always had spare time afterwards. We rented a car and went there. More than once, I rented a car five times. That one time, I didn't rent a car when the president of the college in Winfield, where I also taught in Belarusian - there is a Belarusian department there - said: "If you rent a car, I will treat it as an offense. Take the college car." We went to Dallas. My wife and I visited the place, had talks, went around. No! He was assassinated by the local organised crime. I am sure of that.

Besides, Americans do not believe in Warren's [Chief Justice Earl Warren, Head of the Warren Commission who investigated this murder] version. He investigated the case for 9 months. And he concluded Oswald killed him alone and unaided. Otherwise, serious questions arise. How could the security in the USA fail to prevent such an incident!?

Kashtalian: Let's turn to your work. What was your first place of work?

Shushkevich: My first workplace was the Botanical Gardens, when I was a student at school. Together with my neighbour Yurka I delivered water. I do not remember whether it was in Year 7, 8, or 9. I can't recall exactly. We were paid little money since there were no water-supply lines, nothing.

We filled barrels, drawn by horses, with water, using buckets, and brought them to old women who planted everything and watered the plants. This was my first place of work. The next workplaces were the following: when I was a university student, I taught physics at the Institute of the National Economy and gave practice classes there; I was an assistant at school, then I substituted a teacher at the school where I studied, at the school No. 13. These were my first workplaces. And then I pursued my doctoral studies.

Kashtalian: How did you spend your first salary?

Shushkevich: What first salary?

Kashtalian: At the Botanical Gardens, for example.

Shushkevich: I was allowed everything. I do not remember now.

I can only remember that I bought a camera, "Kamsamolets" [in Belarusian: Komsomol member] partially with my own money, and partially with my mother's help. It was in 1946. I also bought some other appliances. I was eager to take shots. Development, contact printing. I did everything by myself. I went through all of this. Until now, I have certain 6 x 6 photos. Also in my book.

Kashtalian: You've handed over your archives to the BSMaALA [Belarusian State Museum and Archives of Literature and Arts]? Am I right?

Shushkevich: No. My archives haven't been handed over anywhere.

Kashtalian: You haven't done this yet?

Shushkevich: Do I have to?

Kashtalian: You, a prominent historical figure. It seems to me that it would be a good thing.

Shushkevich: Being aware of the situation in the Supreme Council, I handed over several letters to the National Archives, being afraid that it wouldn't be in good hand there, and left the copies with them. It's a letter from Pope John Paul II. I'm very proud that I corresponded with him. And a letter from Kiryl ["Kirill" in Russian; head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch of Moscow]. He wasn't Kiryl yet at that time. He wasn't a patriarch. I'm embarrassed to read that correspondence now because he told lies in it. I will not hand them over. I didn't hand over anything. My sister handed over certain documents to the archives. My certificates for Doctor of Sciences, candidate of sciences, senior scientist researcher and laureate of state prize diplomas. Those ones. And then, when I needed them, they issued certificates for me confirming that I'm their holder. This is done instantly, by computer, this is well organised in Belarus.

Kashtalian: What are the achievements in your professional life you are most proud of?

Shushkevich: Most recently, I somehow start feeling pride about my candidate's dissertation that I scribed. It was marked with the letters "SC" meaning "strictly confidential". I described a method of detection of a radio receiver, held by a man, in transport, to analyse radiolocator station signals. This method was discovered 10 years later by the Americans. It's currently used in the Soviet army since they invited me to give lectures at the production plant in Tomsk.

This device makes it possible to detect the concentrations of radio electronic equipment in a disabled state. It detects whether these concentrations are high or not. I started feeling great pride in it. And as for the subsequent, political actions: it's impossible not to be proud of the Belavezha Accords. I'm very proud of them. And I'm also proud that I was responsible for the removal of nuclear weapons from Belarus; this is my achievement. I passed this via the Supreme Council [a supreme permanent representative and legislative government body in the Republic of Belarus in 1991-1996]. Please be aware that I had no authority as an individual. I had it in the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus since I presided over the Presidium [from 1991-1994]. However, the Presidium majority were my opponents in the best case scenario, and the rest were enemies.

The same applies to the Supreme Council. But I made good use of the moments when inspiration required adopting something. So I repeat: the Belavezha Accords and the removal of nuclear weapons from the territory of Belarus.

Kashtalian: Could you cite examples for when you were underestimated in your professional life?

Shushkevich: Apart from Lukashenka's mean tricks which deprived me of a proper pension. He is allowed to do everything. I didn't get it. Well, the Academy of Sciences but it's subordinated to Lukashenka. I'm the only one who is not paid the associate member

money. I had a ridiculous pension. My pension was 32 US cents. Such wisdom.

However, I earned quite well at the time on visits. But I want to say that, as my wife used to say, decent people usually die in poverty. And I want to say that I celebrated the New Year in Mexico the last three years [2017, 2018, 2019]. I did not even spend a cent either on myself or on my wife who travels with me. This is an appreciation of those who estimate my achievements in their own way. I'm not going to divulge since I do not have documentary evidence. But I can tell you that it's due to a letter which I sent to one politician, and he released several political prisoners.

Kashtalian: If it were possible to turn back history what would you have done differently?

Shushkevich: I do not think in the conditional tense. There were many missteps, however to be wise today after the event is not the same. My major mistake was that I had great faith in those who, in fact, were "digging a hole" for me.

Kashtalian: To proceed with the subject: is it pertinent relevant because of your political activities?

Shushkevich: Yes, because of the political ones. And as for the scientific activities, it's all the same. My students already had academic honours.

I didn't, because I didn't obey those people whom I considered to be despicable. According to the mafia approach. For example, I could never defend my thesis for a doctor's degree in Belarus. I had many enemies here. Great enemies. Not in regards to science but maybe in terms of those who envied me. However, I defended it with a type of thesis committee that presented all kinds of complaints against me. Anonymous, by the way, not a single one open. At the end, they had no significance since my thesis committee was the Thesis Committee [starts quoting in Russian] of the All-Union Research Institute for Optical and Physical Measurements (VNIIOFI).

That's a leading institute in nuclear metrology. Among the members of the thesis committee there were three Nobel laureates who were present at my defense. There were Semionau, Pasau and Prokharau [the surnames are translated from Belarusian not from Russian]. I was told the following: "Don't worry! If you defended there, nobody will interfere." [Shushkevich states the voting was 16 to 2] Indeed, I defended the thesis on the 13th of May, and on the 10th of December I was awarded a Doctor of Sciences Diploma.

Kashtalian: In what year did that happen?

Shushkevich: It was in 1970.

Kashtalian: Doctor or candidate?

Shushkevich: Doctor! I defended the candidate's thesis here. The candidate's thesis was a trifle, that was in 1963. As I told you, the candidate's thesis' topic was secret. I titled it [starts quoting in Russian]: "Physical principles in detection of spy radio sets". Besides, that was due to an order of the KGB, of the scientific institute of the KGB. So, I have a long-established relationship with the KGB.

Kashtalian: And the doctor's thesis: was it also secret?

Shushkevich: My doctor's thesis is secret but for different reasons. It actually contains

one of the examples of my approach. It was that case named [starts quoting in Russian] "Informative parameters of electric signals". That was quite different, general topic, different examples, related to my specific research. It's not all that simple to describe. When you fail to understand IT, you will fail to understand this physics part as well.

Kashtalian: I suppose that you became familiar with computers quite early?

Shushkevich: I became familiar with them quite early, however nowadays my granddaughter has a better command of computers compared to me. Was I familiar with them? I can show you my college textbook, co-authored with two of my doctoral students. They asked: "Can you do something?". I said: "Let's do it together, dividing it into parts".

They are very proud of this book, although it's no longer of relevance now. The title of the book is *Microprocessor and IBM*. That's another book I wrote. I also won a state science award for a textbook. It was titled *Theoretical Basics of Radioelectronics*. To get a flat, I agreed to take the position of a prorektor of the Minsk Radiotechnical Institute. So I got a flat. But I also saw the difference.

I liked the university most of all due to my work at the Radiotechnical Institute. It had the reputation of an excellent institute. But compared to the university, it was an infant school. But the whole story is that they are now trying everything to turn a university into an infant school.

Kashtalian: Were you satisfied with the progress in your professional career? Or do you regret anything?

Shushkevich: I do not regret. I only regret that I did little.

Kashtalian: Did your work have any impact on your family?

Shushkevich: Needless to say that I got good wages. I earned a lot by Soviet standards. And all this was according to the law. I was offered a position of a director of a research institute in Lvov [in Ukrainian: Lviv]. It was offered by the chairman of the State Standards Committee of the USSR, Valitau Varkhat Amerkhanavich.

That matter had to be consented by the party city committee of Lvov, I divorced at the time. When he [Amerkhanavich] took my party membership card I was already a party member. He saw my party dues, and said: "I do not have any questions." I was to be paid less there at first however it was a position of high prestige. The party dues made it possible to calculate my monthly wage as it was a crime if financial incomes were not proven correctly. So I had party dues which indicated that I earned 700-800 rubles per month.

I can explain how this sum was assembled: 450 rubles for the work as a professor, 50 rubles for being head of department and half from 450 for the work that was executed under a contract with enterprises or research institutes. Thus, we have the sum.

Kashtalian: Did you have certain benefits, special procurement during the Soviet period?

Shushkevich: I had no benefits or special privileges [like special food packages] during the Soviet period. I had a high salary. The secretary sometimes said to me: "You earn more than I do, what else do you want." However those "special board" and "special food packages" which he had, made his salary much more effective than mine. I had no

activity-specific benefits.

Kashtalian: In what year did you join the party?

Shushkevich: It was an odyssey. I was appointed to the position of a pro-rector of the Minsk Radiotechnical Institute on the 5th of January 1967. The department where I worked and which I chaired later, had a certain volume of contractual works, mostly thanks to me, and I worked as an associate professor. Its volume of contractual works exceeded that of the Radiotechnical Institute on the whole. I started to implement this. Therefore, they appointed me to the position, and I got a flat.

Then I divorced and left the previous flat to the ex-wife. Indeed, I left with only a briefcase. I started to do something, and then a decision of the Party Committee on Science was brought to my notice. I felt pretty sick about it: I wasn't invited by the party committee; I wasn't a member. They made decisions on science. I went to Sharapau [Sharapau Vasil, Head of Minsk City Executive Committee from 1955-1968) who appointed me and sent me to the Radiotechnical Institute. I said: "But it's impossible to work like this." He responded: "Everything will be okay, go home." I had just reached the Radiotechnical Institute when party committee secretary Lyavonau appeared, and I met the rector. "On our recommendation, the party city committee allotted a place for you to join the party".

I became a communist party candidate in 1967, and party member in 1968. It was impossible to work otherwise. Besides, after this happened, after I had become a candidate, I was invited everywhere. To the extent beyond the limits, since they got a good deal of flak.

Kashtalian: Did you also get into the Marxism-Leninism school under this line?

Shushkevich: Not under the line. Under different one. Every Soviet intellectual, research worker had to improve standards of knowledge in the society. I left in order not to cause problems. It was quite good that it was a night school university. We were required to attend a lecture twice a week. Everything was familiar at the university, and it was quite okay to attend the lectures, delivered by familiar people. I graduated from one, and then I was told: "You should attend." "But I already graduated from it." "It was 10 years ago. You should upgrade your qualification."

They took great pains about this. I attended again, and again graduated from it. I can't help laughing. Overall, it was ridiculous. They were complying with some orders, and I was complying with their orders in order to have good working relationships at the university.

Kashtalian: Could you name the politicians who served as an example for you at the time, and now? Who were the people you admired?

Shushkevich: A difficult question. In the Soviet Union – none. And abroad? In literature. I was sometimes astonished by the acts of some politicians, and I dwelled on what was going on. But as for a certain historic period? No!

There weren't such people. My father taught me to be fascinated by Belarusian literature, Belarusian authors. It's impossible to have a greater respect for the Belarusian poets, authors than my father had. And as for Kupala and Kolas? They are near saints. I was proud of the fact that I had contacts with them somewhere. And as for politics? When I

first got into politics, I thought that it was something difficult. The Soviet politicians had to know only the following sentence: “I control and you obey. Keep to a plan at any cost.” That’s all. And you had to understand the Party’s policy. That was not about the rule of law. You had to understand.

They wrote the following [starts quoting in Russian]: “He has correct understanding of the Party’s policy”. What does that even mean? It means that he follows the voice of the Party, not the law. And I also had a correct understanding. I had no choice.

Kashtalian: When did you come across real, genuine politicians for the first time?

Shushkevich: You will be surprised, I think. For the first time, I came across them at a Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR. I saw Gorbachev [Mikhail Gorbachev (born in 1931), a Soviet and Russian government leader, politician, party official and public figure. The last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR (1985-1991). The last Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1988-1989), then the first Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1989-1990). The first and the only president of the USSR (1990-1991)] there. I saw the people who were already sympathetic to me. At the beginning, I thought that Gorbachev was a new phenomenon in our country. In 1984 I saw Gorbachev’s televised press conference for foreign journalists; he answered questions without reading the prepared text. I thought that new times had come. I hung Gorbachev’s portrait in my office in the department.

But when he appeared on television addressing the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, I tore the portrait to pieces and threw it away. I lost respect. When I came across the understanding, I understood that there were great politicians. Such as Bismarck, Churchill, de Gaulle. And such disastrous leaders as Hitler. He was a great politician. He made the nation obey! An evil politician, a terrifying politician but great. There are no questions. I started to understand things more or less when I started reading different books.

Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky. There are the collected works of Lenin, 55 volumes, at our dacha. My wife has the greatest respect. A brilliant politician! He made them obey! A brilliant, a great politician. Those current-day politicians? Leaders of the CIS Republics [the Commonwealth of Independent State – an international treaty, intended to govern the relations of cooperation among the former USSR states (but not among all of them)]. As for Belarus, I considered Kebich [Vyachaslau Kebich (born in 1936) – the first Prime Minister of Belarus from 1990 to 1994] a good politician. Afterwards I understood that he was not very good. The part in my book where I wrote about him, is supertitled [starts quoting in Russian]: “If I only I would had known with whom I travelled, with whom I drank vodka”. And I’m tempted to add, according to Vysotsky [Vladimir Vysotsky (1938-1980) – a Soviet poet, a film and theatre actor, a bard; starts quoting in Russian]: “I would have left before reaching Vologda [a city in Russia, 450 km far from Moscow].”(laughs)

Among those whom I liked, with whom I had great conversations, was the president of the Council of Europe, Katynya Lumiere. Then Johannes Rau with whom I talked. I immediately faced disapproval here. I was alone, no one was on my side. It was my friends’ joke that I promised not to withdraw as a candidate. And I didn’t. I was elected a people’s deputy. Already [Yafrem] Sakalou, secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee, wanted to advise me on the one hand, and Zianon Pazniak [Zianon Pazniak,

born in 1944, a Belarusian politician and public figure, archaeologist, art historian, writer, leader of the Conservative Christian Party – BNF (since 1999). An opposition politician] on the other hand. I visited him. I always liked manifestations of the Belarusian identity. In some way, he reminds much of the current president except for the Belarusian focus and erudition.

Although he is an artist by education, he has much deeper knowledge of history than I do, but this is not comparable since I didn't work at it. As for our Belarusian public figures, I think that we had both heroes and victims. Nobody took notice of those of whom we can be proud, who won independence.. Do you know why I am proud of the Belavezha Accords?

Because it stipulated two positions. First, it was signed by Yeltsin [Boris Yeltsin (1931 - 2007) - a Soviet and Russian party official, government leader and a politician. The first president of the Russian Federation (1991-1999)], leader of Russia], Belarus was recognised a sovereign state in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and afterwards it was ratified by the Duma. Below is my signature. My signature to the Belavezha Accords is the first one in alphabetical order. Belarus got de facto (actual) independence not de jure (formal) since it was recognised by Russia. Talking about legal independence doesn't make it a fact. But Russia which always only considered us as part of it, a colony, recognised [our] independence. I consider it a great achievement. I think of Yeltsin as a very outstanding, skilled politician.

There were many other sincere, naïve to an extent, good people, at the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR. I know so many unpleasant things, for example about Gorbachev that I can't think about him as a great politician. Although, he did much more for the reunification of Germany than anybody else. So it's Germany that should build a monument to him, not us.

Kashtalian: Was it purely coincidental that you got into politics? Or was it a predictable process?

Shushkevich: Purely coincidental.

Kashtalian: Please, tell me about that.

Shushkevich: I was proposed as a candidate for various deputy roles at meetings many times.

I always withdrew my candidacy, because I had an interesting job, an interesting team, by far more interesting. Then I understood that it was a struggle for justice, especially the Chernobyl disaster. I'm a professional, I knew what was going on and why. When it was represented otherwise, I was outraged. Kebich represented it more or less accurately. For that reason, I treated him so well. Here were layabouts who only complied with the orders of the Party. I was aware of absolutely criminal acts; due to the communist views and a general lack of education. Therefore, it was difficult here. But I got into politics coincidentally because it was my friends' joke.

We delivered some very important work; by the way, I didn't superintend it, but it was executed by the department, headed by me. It was accepted by the customers, and then they got somewhere a bottle of vodka; it was impossible to buy vodka at the time. A big

group of us celebrated the fact, drinking drops of alcohol. They said: "Tomorrow there will be a meeting, and we'll propose you as a candidate. If you withdraw your candidacy, we will never go out with you again. And you will have to sit still at the department!" I promised not to withdraw my candidacy. I even liked a bit what happened since I made up my mind about becoming a candidate! It's like for a soldier to come forward at a formation and to say that he wants to be a general. I had a good and interesting job. In that situation when I was criticised by the party that I betrayed my father, that I was a secret informant of the KGB. That is how I came into politics. Then I decided: Well, guys, I am going to win the elections.

I was elected on the first ballot with 76 percent of the vote. Nobody else received the same amount of votes.

Kashtalian: For what electoral district?

Shushkevich: For Maskouska-Frunzenskaya electoral district, 200,000 voters. For the People's Deputies of the USSR.

Kashtalian: Did you run a campaign?

Shushkevich: Yes. It appeared to be that university students and a retired general were my best candidate agents. He retired on a pension, and started to work at our university, with my colleagues. At a large meeting, in the hall on Kisyalevasomeone asked [switches to Russian]: "Why are you getting into politics? You don't understand anything. And, in general, what have you ever done for society?"

At this point, the general stood up and said: "I'm a general such-and-such in retirement. People were taught by Shushkevich's textbooks; they not only propagate true science but also true morality. Therefore, the question is inappropriate. It's scandalous to ask such questions". [Switches to Belarusian] They started shouting. There was one female student, a nice, small, delicate girl who didn't use coarse words. When some women gathered, and started to say: "What do you?", she started to call her names. And, all of a sudden, she unleashed a stream of ear-splitting profanities.

Then they all calmed down. Very interesting things happened with the senior management in gas supply. A large hall and a pre-election meeting for the People's Deputies of the USSR. It was easy for me to win the elections for the Supreme Council, without any problems. There was a meeting, when someone stood up and said [switches to Russian]: "For some reason, all the window sills here are covered with leaflets saying that it is problematic to find such a despicable person as Shushkevich. "What does it mean? What's the matter?" And so on. "What is it?" he asks the Presidium. All of them said: "We don't know." Then someone stood up and said: "We have freedom of speech now, and everyone prints whatever they want." [switches to Belarusian]

And then a woman appeared. She started shouting at him; it was district committee secretary Susha: "You, damned Lapidus [Stanislavavich recalls this memory, but still today doesn't know what it means - Lapidus, except for the Jewish surname; switches over to Russian], I printed these leaflets with my hands all night long as you ordered. And you said that it's a villain who needs to be restrained." [switches to Belarusian] He ran away.

Kashtalian: When did you start to take part in the elections. Were those political debates your first political debates?

Shushkevich: Afterwards, I didn't feel inept whatsoever since I learned quicker than the others. I read *The Open Society and Its Enemies* by Popper. It's enough to understand what's going on in the world.

And then I started. And there were many mistakes. Mikhaylau [Anatol Mikhaylau or Anatoli Mikhailov in Russian, a philosopher, rector of the European Humanities University (EHU) for more than 20 years, including the period in exile] returned to the university. I thought: Jesus! What a man! And he is going to Klyauchena's department! Klyauchena was such a Marxist-Leninist, awkward. I supported him, he was supported. He – a fighter against the negative forms of Marxism-Leninism. Afterwards when I found his pamphlet "Philosophy of the Fated: To the critique of existentialism", I thought: Holy Christ! I dealt with him. I was even terrified. That man simulated the whole times. Besides, the pamphlet was withdrawn from everywhere, from all the libraries. But they got it for me.

Now I have a copy of it.

Kashtalian: Have you ever had a debate where you took principle stands and it was quite a challenge?

Shushkevich: It happened many times. If you posed such a question, it was quite easy to preserve the power or to take roots in that environment... If I had wished. Just to act against conscience. But I never betrayed. I could remain silent. That was my biggest betrayal. I already started to be active in politics; however I couldn't get over myself or abandon my principles somehow. There were some great betrayals that I was shocked about. For example, Mechyslau Ivanavich Gryb [born in 1938, second chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus. He replaced Stanislau Shushkevich in the position]; it seemed that we were in everything together.

While on the way he said to me: "We will not sign any agreements. We seek neutrality." I didn't sign some of the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organisation] and others. Then, all of a sudden, Gryb spoke to the audience, suddenly supporting it. I said: "Mechyslau Ivanavich, but you had a different approach". And he responded: "But now it's me who is head of the Committee for State Security, and this is a decision of the Committee." I said: "What about your own point of view? What's it like from your point of view?" "I'm not obliged to answer questions like that." Just like that. I would feel ashamed if I had ever done something like that, but not him. A general. Like water off a duck's back. However, there are other great generals.

For example, Kazlouski [Paval Kazlouski, born in 1942, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Belarus (1992-1994)]. Became a colonel general in the Soviet system but is a highly decent man.

Kashtalian: Were your political activities more difficult for you compared to the work at the university?

Shushkevich: No. Being in politics is more primitive but it requires knowledge. Our leaders are mostly uneducated. For example, Lukashenko. He is poorly educated. He knows that he should make every effort, take all measures to keep power. He doesn't

have other goals. He is not concerned about doing better for Belarus. I haven't justified, even inside, that some of my acts were influenced by my own interests, and I will not.

Kashtalian: What key events have had an impact on your life?

Shushkevich: I think I already specified them in upbringing my granny in my childhood, and professional competence.

Kashtalian: I'm thinking about historical events

Shushkevich: And historical events. Well, the Chernobyl disaster. A lot of bigotry, errors due to following the party line and to prevent panic. It is simply terrible! I found out that there were people like this! For example, the first secretary of the party city committee, a certain Bazhko.

After the Chernobyl accident, people were anxious. I had suitable measuring equipment in the laboratory. I said: "Whoever visited those areas and wants to check themselves for radioactivity, can come to check their clothes. Though, food products still can't be checked now". Two weeks later, we made it possible to check products, food as well. There was a queue to the university laboratory. I was called by the secretary of the city committee into his office; he asked: "Why do you panic?" I said: "Dear secretary of the city committee! You can teach me politics and political behaviour but as for radiation exposure, I can explain a thing or two to you". That was like a bolt out of the blue for him. He was very offended. Besides, I didn't participate at the elections on the first ballot since I withdrew my candidature.

But he and also the rector of the physical education institute... They both were in that electoral district and both failed during the elections of People's Deputies of the USSR. They both won 15 percent of the vote, and they couldn't take part in the second round of the elections. For that reason a new election was announced. That's when my friends forced me into it with their joke.

Kashtalian: When did you learn from the Chernobyl disaster?

Shushkevich: We learned from the Chernobyl disaster the next day through the student laboratory. This story could be a plot for a small essay. One female student came, and showed the results to a teacher.

And she said [switches to Russian]: "You know, dear, you have nothing like the truth. You should repeat the measurements!" She measured again, came again, showed. "Don't make me laugh," the teacher said, "this device can't give such results". Infuriated, the student responded: "Well, if you are so clever, let's control together!" They measured, and, in fact, detected high radioactivity. All of this happened in our laboratory where we taught how to work.

Kashtalian: Did it happen at the BSU [Belarusian State University]?

Shushkevich: Yes, [switches back to Belarusian] it took place at the BSU. There we taught how to work with radioactive agents, we had ultra-low radiation sources for the sake of safety and health. There was a background level that all those measurements interfered with. Thus, we learned from the Chernobyl accident through a departmental student's practical work.

Then we divulged the information and found out what was going on in the reactor. That's about it.

Kashtalian: But you were prohibited to protest somehow?

Shushkevich: To protest against whom?

Kashtalian: There was a May Day demonstration.

Shushkevich: We didn't know about this! The point is: Why, to protest what? All the civil defence headquarters had instructions on how to behave in the event of a radioactive emission. All of this was on paper. We didn't need to protest against and to invent in this respect. All these things were well thought out, like I said on paper, and the details were spelled out. But nobody made use of it. They waited for Party instructions. And what did Gorbachev do? He took refuge beneath the bench. We didn't have a decision, an instruction from the Party of what to do under those conditions. Therefore there was nobody to protest against. But people already started to apply iodine. We said: "We will do checks! What do you have, what grade of radioactivity?"

In the first days, when people were in the contaminated area, clothes should have been burned. Because they became contaminated, those who went to that region to Gomel Oblast. But to protest? No. So here is what we did: headed by the president of the Academy of Sciences, there were six of us, an advisory group to some extent. We were not to panic, the party discipline was important as I adhered to it: Don't panic. We met, suggested ideas of what to do, and Barysevich reported to the authorities and to Kebich what should be done. So protest against what? We didn't know about the stupidities that were going to occur, that children would be brought to the May Day demonstration, about radioactive iodine. Nobody knew this. Among us, at least.

Kashtalian: When you think of yourself as a politician, in your opinion, what makes you a politician and how do you conceive of yourself in this role?

Shushkevich: I self-identify as an amateur politician because I didn't deal with politics in a serious way and for a long time. I didn't have that opportunity. I had the opportunity to manipulate in order to adopt some decisions which I liked. I didn't get in time for doing the big politics.

Kashtalian: What does political responsibility mean for you? What does it mean to be a citizen?

Shushkevich: I haven't thought about this before. I think you should behave decently. That's enough.

Kashtalian: Is there something that could make you go onto the streets to protest?

Shushkevich: I'm afraid that nothing could bring me onto the streets nowadays since I walk only with the help of a stick. Joining a demonstration with a walking stick? There is no sense in it. My heart gave out in 2013. Before that, I took part in them, like everyone.

Kashtalian: When do you feel that you are a Belarusian and when do you feel that you are a European?

Shushkevich: I feel that I'm a European-Belarusian all the time.

Kashtalian: For those who will be listening to this recording, could you please briefly

describe how you see the history of our nation in the general context? The role of our nation?

Shushkevich: I communicated with many excellent historians, and there were also excellent historians in the party, the central rada [in Belarusian: “Council”] which I headed for a long time; I asked for the changes now simply due to the age. I think that we had the heaviest forced Russification during the Soviet period. We had it before, but it didn’t affect the peasant masses. With the TV broadcasting, the propaganda reached all social groups. We have a strong anti-Belarusian propaganda, a forced Russification. What is important? I like Russian intellectuals, I like Russian literature. But the behaviour of the Russian policymakers is imposed on us, and it’s mostly imperial. I was a Russophile and Kremlinophile when Yeltsin was there. Because I knew that there was a great president of Russia who supported the democratisation of practices, a respect for national feelings etc. I knew him very well, and I’m proud of the fact that we were friends with him. He was in politics for a long time. He became president on 12 June 1991. I remember his inauguration speech well. That brilliant agenda of a fair and democratic Russia. And then, as I see it, the followers of the imperial politics came to power again. For this reason, I’m now a Kremlinophobe, but remain a Russophile. I have respect for the Russian intelligentsia and nation but it’s held in low esteem there.

Kashtalian: Do you give credit to the European institutions and bodies? Politicians?

Shushkevich: It’s a very difficult question. At first when I hung to their words, I believed them. But when I faced them in practice, I came to realise that they weren’t a conglomerate of likeminded people who knew where, and what was going on in Europe. I spoke to the European deputies from Greece and Italy, and explained to them what was going on in Belarus. I talked about the dictatorship here and, in general, what we should do from my point of view and what assistance we expected from them. And after all that, one deputy stood up and said: “And why don’t you take legal actions at the constitutional court? All that can be easily settled.”

Such naivety! Explain to a person that, first of all, we do not have a normal constitutional court, and, secondly, only 5 bodies can take legal actions, and an individual can’t. I explained this to him for an hour, and he still asked the question. Due to this, relationships with Europe are not that simple. The forefront political players are usually very well-educated and very proficient but this mass of political “lightweights” can distract them, at the European Parliament, in the European committees. Sometimes I don’t even know on whom it’s easier for us to lean: on the right-wingers, left-wingers or centrists? This is a structure to work with where a thoughtful approach is needed, suggesting an understanding of it. This requires high qualifications and great patience. And a certain inspiration.

Kashtalian: What brings you hope and what scares you about the relationship of Belarus with Europe?

Shushkevich: Nothing scares me. Since legally, they have a democracy there, and the pursuit of welfare is the same as everywhere but their achievements are much greater. Our starting conditions were better than in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Our average earnings are currently three and a half-times lower, and purchasing power is also

three-times or three and a half-times lower than there. It means that their development followed the right path. Due to science, due to the political changes under the leadership of [Lech] Walesa, for example, in Poland. And as for the economic progress under the leadership of Balcerowicz, in Poland again. As for the intellectual and religious changes, progress like Pope John Paul II, for example.

Our major positions are held by people who do not possess this nature and this human dignity. For the time being, we do not have our [Lech] Walesa, our Balcerowicz, our John Paul II. We need to raise them.

Kashtalian: How does the creation of the European Union affect us?

Shushkevich: Your questions are so complicated that there is no escaping. I gave a lecture at the University of Vienna. I gave lectures for five following years in Vienna. I was asked beforehand to provide the key words for a teacher, for an interpreter.

I said: "I don't have thesis statements but I have a presentation; I will send my slides." And I sent the slides to them via mail. One hour later they replied: "Please, remove the sixth tab." I didn't have my computer with me, and I said: "Ok, I will remove it." I came and took a look at the sixth tab. A quotation from Churchill's lecture at the University of Zurich in 1946. In the Russian translation: "Europe should unite to confront Russian barbarism". They felt embarrassed to bring up Churchill who was such a symbolic figure. Schuman was the first, preceded by Churchill who explained why Europe had to unite. They felt embarrassed to remember that they wanted to unite to confront Russian barbarism. And they feel embarrassed about receiving reprimands of some kind from Russia. When being in Vienna I saw that menus were in Russian everywhere, everything was available in Russian. They are very pleased to receive Russian tourists. They are guided by immediate benefits. But at the same time they do not care about all the violations of democracy, freedoms and rights in Russia. For that reason, the relationships with Europe represent something that requires regular work, governed by the postulates of a democracy and of a society of human rights.

Kashtalian: And what, in your opinion, doesn't belong to Europe? In regards to politics and culture.

Shushkevich: Doesn't belong? Human decency. Any politics has requirements to people, including requirements to politicians. This is human decency. And we have problems with it since we are governed by various temporary intentions and do not remember things about the basic human that I'd call Christian features. I think they are the same in other religions but are expressed differently. Apparently, believers will name the Ten Commandments while non-religious people simply believe that human dignity should be retained. This doesn't depend on Europe and doesn't belong to Europe but belongs to humankind.

Kashtalian: Is Europe a political or a cultural project?

Stanislavavich: I think that it's rather cultural than political. And it's necessary to proceed from culture to politics since it's easier with culture: you will not be accused of a betrayal. And a genuine, true culture always bears a plus mark. The true culture is summed up, and the general culture improves. For this reason, I guess, from culture.

Kashtalian: Can you recollect the funniest moment in your life? The funniest thing that happened to you?

Shushkevich: It was funny after all. Well, I can't recall instantly.

Kashtalian: Maybe, an often told joke from your youth?

Shushkevich: Surprisingly, I laughed most of all at my classmates' Jewish jokes. We had six Jews and 20 non-Jews. We were very good friends and lived in friendship, and I am in contact with those still alive. I like Jewish anecdotes and jokes very much. And I don't like when people are ashamed to say "zhyd" ["Jude" in Belarusian] in Belarusian since the Belarusian language didn't have other words apart from "zhyd". "Gabrey" ["Jew" in Belarusian]? Let it be "gabrey".

Kashtalian: You lived more, I lived less behind the so-called "Iron Curtain". You didn't have the chance to become acquainted with certain literature, works of art. How did you gain access to that forbidden information apart from the Voice of America radio station?

Shushkevich: My friend Professor Kamarou got the first forbidden information. He wasn't a professor yet at the time. It was in Odessa, at a local flea market. It was an edition of the Bible in Russian. I read it for the first time. My granny had the Bible in Polish since all the Catholics prayed in Polish at that time. But I didn't peruse it before.

And I perused it that time, and thought that the manner of presentation was interesting. I can't say that I read it; I really looked through it. It was the first information source about the world order according to other principles. But we didn't have access to any literature, only with restricted access. Some publications were initially distributed in small quantities. For example, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. As for Solzhenitsyn, I like his first work more, brief, clear and serene. But then I had many questions.

Do you still ask about jokes? I don't remember them any longer. The poems by Baradulin are funny. The rhyme that the Belarusians might be proud about. When translated? A good poet but ordinary. But I can't remember these kind of jokes.

Kashtalian: Talking about the access to prohibited literature, works of world art, films which were not screened in the USSR. Do you think you could have been a different person if you hadn't encountered such obstacles?

Shushkevich: No. I couldn't be a different person. I really enjoyed watching "The Godfather" in Polish when I stayed in Krakow. It was very interesting. It demonstrated that the communist system was better than the others.

Surprising! Similar things were impossible in our country, such as a mafia, gangsters, and others. I can't say that I'm that kind of person who liked prohibited things.

Kashtalian: Speaking about the notion of freedom. Did it differ for you in the past and now? Would you like to have a different freedom in the future?

Shushkevich: My freedom is not limited now by anyone. But I don't benefit from this, I only suffer losses. I can't praise a person if I regard them as indecent. Why shame a person if there are no reasons for this? And as for criminal, political cases, I support the idea of compliance with laws even if they are bad, striving, however to change them for better. But we lack this. There is one individual who is to blame for this, who enjoys power,

and that is our president. It's a pity that he doesn't have an appropriate education. And didn't study. On the other hand, I think that, maybe, it's not so bad that he is an uneducated person since, for example, Putin, who is "more educated" and who was trained by the KGB, fights for the same – for the retention of his power but employing more evil measures. To accuse Lukashenka of the disappearance of our politicians, of their liquidation? I'm afraid that it's logical to accuse him, but thus far there is no direct evidence. Well, and what about Putin? Direct evidence shows that he doesn't have mercy on people. And Crimea, Lugansk, Donetsk demonstrate this. After all, we adopted a constitution which limits military operations of Belarusian troops abroad. Russia doesn't have it. So, you've raised a question which may require much time to answer. And there will be only presumptions.

Kashtalian: What do borders mean for you? I am speaking about political borders of the countries.

Shushkevich: I understand borders in the following way: if relevant parties agreed, and signed agreements, the agreements are to be adhered to above all. If you consider this wrong, this still mustn't be changed by applying measures as the ones used by the USSR to annex the Baltic Republics and by Russia to annex Crimea. This is unacceptable. Borders must be treated as sacred.

When the Russian president says that there should be no discussions about Iturup [an island of the southern group of the Greater Kuril Ridge of the Kuril Islands, the largest island of the archipelago. A part of the Russian Federation after the Second World War, and is an object of the territorial disputes with Japan], since the Russian constitution provides for territorial integrity, I think that it's necessary to think it over. It makes sense to amend the constitution for this purpose, to raise a question in this regard. I visited the Kuril Islands, Kamchatka and Japan, many times. And it would be nice if the Russian citizens lived on Iturup similar to the Japanese on the Kuril Islands.

Kashtalian: What do you think about the abolishment of the borders in the European Union?

Shushkevich: I consider it the greatest achievement. When I travel from Minsk to Vilnius by a car, I wish we were in the European Union. And when I travel from France to Switzerland, I'm simply glad that the European Union came to an understanding with Switzerland with respect to the borders although Switzerland is not a member state of the EU. It's nice to travel around Europe, paying no regard to the borders. Do you know what it means observing those queues of 100, 200 cars at the border? It means that we don't have the wit to get rid of this.

Kashtalian: What future do you see for Belarus? Or would you like to see?

Shushkevich: I would like to see a European future for Belarus. For Belarus to have the same opportunities and rights that the European countries have. The Russian version of justice, that of the Kremlin, is flexible, versatile and inhuman while the European one is human.

Kashtalian: Does European society need to develop further? In which direction? Perhaps, you have some ideas?

Shushkevich: No. I have nothing to suggest to those who have made better progress than we have.

Kashtalian: When we speak about conflicts in Europe, what do you think: are they due to the fact that Europe is too strong or too weak?

Shushkevich.: There are conflict situations in Europe with the frontier territories, and it's not me who should recommend how to settle them. But a decision should be sought.

I refer to Spain and Catalonia. I was there, by the way. I see great achievements in Europe on the path of settlement of the national problems, for example, that of Andorra. I know the Prime Minister of Andorra well, we had meetings, and he invited me to visit the country. I see that Europe is in the search for a solution. In disputes between the Spanish and Basques, I even misrecognise them, but for some reason, I have sympathy for those who don't have their own nation state. I'm on their side. But whether it's good or bad? I don't know. Europe should reach a decision. Or at least it would seem to me. I'm afraid that I'm influenced by the definition of a "nation", formulated by Lenin.

Lenin or Stalin. Jews weren't a nation since they didn't have their own territory. They got the territory, and became a nation in terms of Marxism-Leninism. And in terms of normal philosophy and normal international relations... It's difficult to say. I'm even embarrassed to formulate my wishes since I can support those who are less popular. But somehow, I have sympathy for national minorities. For example, for the Scots in Great Britain. They voted against Brexit. I don't know why I like them more than those who voted in favour of Brexit. But I'm not entitled to give them recommendations as they democratically arrived at the decision, and the government seeks to implement the decision of the referendum. Although, I'll be honest with you, I don't like this.

Kashtalian: Could Europe initiate conflicts in the future?

Shushkevich: Yes, it could. I will give you the following example. The challenging flows of migrants to Europe from those countries where many children are born, could be read as a kind of payback for Europe's violent colonization history.

Conflicts will arise, they can't be avoided, and they need to be settled on an ongoing basis. When I see that the Germans blame Merkel's refugee politics, I like it. But when Merkel replies to them, explaining, why she did it what she did, I like it even more. So I'm not the person who should be asked how it should be.

Kashtalian: Should Europe be responsible for the countries which were colonised at one time?

Shushkevich: There are grounds to bear responsibility, and it seems to me that Europe meets the liabilities. I saw almost no British in London, in central London. Europe already demonstrates that it incurs the liability.

Kashtalian: If we speak about the roots of Europe, can we say that the roots are Judeo-Christian?

Shushkevich: Judeo-Christian. But they were Islamic as well in a way. If you visit Spain, you will come across such examples. I was persuaded by people who have a good knowledge of religions, that all the religions are based on humanity. They have an aggressive fragment. Especially, when Muslims say we are friends with Mustafa

Dzhemilev, a Crimean Tatar leader. I flew in a plane with him, and we talked. I had an opinion imposed at some point, that the Quran contained certain words about a woman. If a woman was unfaithful or committed a crime, she had to be murdered. He told me that it wasn't so, that it was concocted by those who fought against the Islam. As for other positions, the picture seemed to be more flexible. Accordingly, I think that it should be decided by people who adhere to democratic principles and have respect for people. I don't know, for example, how to combine practices in the Saudi Arabia and in some European country. But it's certain that it's essential to seek to get closer to each other. You can see that there is progress even there.

Kashtalian: Does the situation in Europe change due to the migratory influx? What do you think?

Shushkevich: I don't know towards what it changes. But if the Germans can offer jobs to all who come to them, and their prosperity increases, it means that they understand what they do, no!? And there are those whose prosperity doesn't increase under such conditions. They protest. Apparently, there should be some kind of a national balance. They can vote their representatives into government in order to settle issues democratically. If those states are really democratic. In our country, it can't be settled democratically as we did not have elections since 1996. We have a woman at the top [Yarmoshna Lidziya or "Lidia Ermoshina" in Russian, chairperson of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus on Elections and Holding Republican Referenda since December 6, 1996] – the elections under her direction have not been recognised since 1996. She has headed the Central Electoral Commission the whole time. This is impossible in a civilised country.

Kashtalian: In your opinion, what are the future challenges or threats for Europe?

Shushkevich: Not astrophysical ones. (*laughs*) They may not be evaded if any. I wouldn't like to express my opinion here. I haven't reached the level as a politician to reflect upon such issues.

Kashtalian: But I would like to know your personal opinion. Do you wish the future generations to identify themselves more as Europeans or to preserve their national identity? Like French, Germans and so on.

Shushkevich: It seems to me that there is no conflict. To preserve the national identity and to do a good European job. I continually get excited over the following example. I visited Germany many times, and I visited France many times. The working week in France is 35 hours, and in Germany – 39 or 40 hours. The French say that we should work better than the Germans to live like they do. And they think that they work this way, and the Germans laugh at this. Which side should one pick? Let them settle the issue by themselves. Why should I recommend something, propose something that depends on such specific conditions. This is a senseless discussion.

Kashtalian: But nevertheless. If one were to analyse the current dynamics of events, will Europe be more open or more closed in the future?

Shushkevich: I think, more open. And it would be nice to have it more open towards us! But I'm afraid that a colossus as Russia won't open itself much for Europe.

Because there's a pseudo-identity that is behind everything there. Like: "We are the Scythians" [a common name in the majority of the nomadic tribes and peoples of Eurasia (from the Carpathians to the Altai), consisting of different Nostratic (mainly Indo-European) ethno-lingual groups]. Even great intellectuals have a desire to be superior. As compared to Russia, it seems to me that Europe is better for the individual. But Japan is also better for the individual as compared to Russia. What way to choose to live better? This one or that one? When we speak about a political regime, we speak about identification. It's an issue for real philosophers, scientists, specialists in social sciences. And I'm a specialist in physics.

Kashtalian: The young generation: will it change anything in the future?

Shushkevich: Undoubtedly.

Kashtalian: Will they make mistakes which they will regret?

Shushkevich: They will make mistakes but I believe that our young people are talented. I often had meetings with various associations of young people. I like them. Though, there is an opposing side wishing to rule as before which is upgrading its techniques of control. It seems to me that it will retreat, but not so promptly as wished. But it will retreat.

Kashtalian: Would you like to give some instructions, parting words to future generations: What should they do, by what should they be guided according to your experience?

Shushkevich: To retain human dignity, and that's all. In the Christian interpretation but it seems to me that I oftentimes mentioned it in other interpretations as well. If an individual retains their human dignity, they are a human. Otherwise? It has been explained a thousand times. Otherwise, it's bad. You can wear different masks.

But as Mikhail Andreevich Likhachevski, an academic, if I recall correctly, said: "You can wear different masks but you can't wear the mask of an intellectual [here: as a part of intelligentsia]." Immediately, after he had made a speech at the Congress of Peoples' Deputies here, people said: "He taught them what was what". In regards to ancestry, Gorbachev, Shevardnadze [Eduard Shevardnadze (1928 - 2014) - a Soviet and Georgian politician and government leader. The First Secretary of Georgia's Komsomol Central Committee (1957-1961), Minister of the Interior of the Georgian SSR (1965-1972), the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia (1972-1985), Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR (1985-1990), Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR (November - December 1991). Hero of Socialist Labour (1981). Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR (1985-1990), Mikhail Gorbachev 's close ally. President of Georgia (1995-2003)] and many others. Applying that to Lukashenka? There is no sense in it. Whatever he does, it won't make him an intellectual. It would be very good to have intellectual youth with decent principles. But my wife says that real intelligentsia dies in poverty.

Maybe, there is an element of truth for Europe here. But a different motto is popular in Korea which says that a man of knowledge can't be poor. Quite the opposite. And I can dwell on both of them. Depending on where I go. To Europe or to Asia.

Kashtalian: Maybe, some things can be borrowed from Asia as well?

Shushkevich: I think that there are no poor people among the men of knowledge either

in Asia or in Africa. At first, I was very surprised at the attitude of the South Koreans towards education. I had so many meetings and lectures there, that it's difficult to enumerate them. But their craving for knowledge is genuine. A fly will make more noise at any lecture there than the whole audience. Information is very important for them. Their businessmen invited me to get acquainted with Belarus. They already have the knowledge which a normal individual should have. But they also take a specific interest. I said: "I can only tell you little". The Korean businessmen responded: "Well, it's enough for us, we wish to have a meeting with you only regarding these issues." And they came, I was surprised, late in the evening! 52 people! They expressed a great wish to be present when I made a speech. I'm afraid that this is hardly possible in our country. A very good attitude towards science there.

Kashtalian: Stanislau Stanislavavich! Thank you very much for the interview!