

**New Leadership to Address Emerging HIV Epidemics in
Eastern Europe and Central Asia
XVI International AIDS Conference
August 14, 2006**

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[START RECORDING]

ALENA PERYSHKINA: So I would like to emphasize that due to the crisis situation, we are shifting these sessions. I was selected as a moderator, which is a negative factor. The positive factor is that session is still taking place, and also I am rapporteur for this section, so I have a threefold responsibility of being a translator, a moderator and a rapporteur. So in this case, as we call in integrated care, we will manage.

I'm a big fan of integrated care approach. The session priority is effective response to HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the context of the new leadership. This topic is very much related to the issue of political wield, the political wield in our region, which was always problematic but also very potential issue. I'm very glad to present now the speaker. And now I will shift to Russian to represent the first speaker and then to translate.

[Russian translation]

ALENA PERYSHKINA: Michael Grishankov is from Russia, and he is the first deputy of the head of the committee of the state Duma, Russia on security. And also, Michael Grishankov

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is the deputy of the intersectional deputy committee group on HIV/AIDS problems.

[Russian translation]

ALENA PERYSHKINA: The key topic for Michael Grishankov's presentation is the political leadership in the Eastern European and Central Asian regions to overcome HIV epidemic role in Russia. Thank you very much.

[Russian translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I just wanted to check if translator has this text. [interposing] Can you not, if you have? Are you ready to translate?

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Good morning, dear friends.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Mr. Chair and dear colleagues.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Due to this crisis situation, the translation will be consecutive and I will delegate

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responsibilities now, which is great. But we have more time so it's okay.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

[interposing]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: It is no secret that for me it is a great honor to be here to be able to address you here at such a representative forum, and I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for the opportunity provided to come here and share some of my ideas.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Today in Russia there is a trend at all levels, and I am sure that it is one that is irreversible and very sustainable toward rethinking the way of evaluating and approaching the problem of HIV/AIDS and most effective ways to address them.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

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MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I would like to point out some very significant events that have taken place in recent times.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: At the end of the year in Russia, there was an announcement that there would be a radical increase financing of state money for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention. And within the framework of a national project, health for these purposes in 2006, there was an allotment of \$100 million dollars, which is 20 times the amount in was for the year 2005.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: On the 21st of April, President Vladimir Putin presided over a presidium of the state, council of the Russian federation, and the title of the presidium was Urgent Measures to Counter the Spread of HIV Infection. The results of this presidium were that there was a number of very important medium-term and long-term solutions proposed. For instance –

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FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Vladimir Putin called for the establishment of a governmental commission for issues related to prevention diagnosis and treatment of HIV infection, which I am confident will become that coordinating body that was lacking at a high level, and will be able to ensure effective cooperation of all structures of the executive and legal branches of the government as well as civil society.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: From the 15th to the 17th of April in Moscow, the first conference on issues related to HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia took place. It was entitled "Rising to the Challenges." There were 1,600 people from 49 countries and, out of these people, 30-percent represented people living with AIDS. Approximately 60-percent were medical doctors, professionals working in prevention and treatment, and approximately 10-percent were representatives of the executive and legislative branches of power.

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MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: On the 8th of June 2006, the parliament that is the state Duma held its first international parliamentary conference on HIV/AIDS in countries of Eurasia and the role of G8 countries as part of the G8 Summit was held in St. Petersburg. The conference included participation of parliamentarians from G8 countries, India, China, countries of the CIS, as well as Brazil and Iran. The outcome statement of the participants of the conference and there were also an initiative taken by an interfactional group of parliamentarians on issues related to AIDS prevention from the state Duma, as well as an interparty parliamentary working group from Great Britain, was sent to the leaders.

This statement was sent to the leaders of the G8. Now there is an agreement that such a conference will become a tradition, and our colleagues from the Wodenstag in Germany, as far as I know, are already working on this issue.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Finally, in July in St. Petersburg, there was a meeting of leaders at the G8 at which the problem of fighting infectious disease including HIV/AIDS

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was one of the three priority issues for discussion. Russia initiated the inclusion of this on the agenda, and now this is something that it characterizes the change that Russia has in its attitude towards this problem.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Today, we are all in the same boat and it is extremely important that the road that we choose will ensure effective use of international experience in order to prevent the spread as well as to prevent and to treat HIV/AIDS.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I would like to dwell for a moment on the importance of the involvement of politicians in the various representative branches of power, and their work in this area is something that cannot be overestimated.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: And today, when you look at Russia, you see a positive trend that shows that in fighting

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the spread of HIV infection, there is a greater involvement of authoritative, respected politicians and public figures. This is something, however, that has to be increased.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: At the same time, despite the fact that I am an optimist, and I do believe in the success of our efforts when we talk about these positive steps that have been taken, as a person who is very pragmatic in my approaches in dealing with challenges, I would like to warn against any excessive euphoria and expectations.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Of course, the issue, this whole set of issues revolving around the fight against HIV/AIDS is very complex and involves an entire set of very, very delicate issues related, for instance, to the implementation of preventive programs, including a program of harm reduction and sexual education in schools.

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MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: What is alarming, however, is that there are individual politicians who are making attempts to have an impact on public opinion through artificial opposition to certain preventive programs that are being carried out within these risk groups, as well as opposition to sex education of teenagers on the one hand, and traditional family and spiritual values on the other.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Undoubtedly, a strong and healthy family of full-fledged spiritual development is part of our main goal and main priorities. We all must strive to this. However, at the same time, there are thousands and thousands of people who are in these so called risk groups - that is, users of injecting drugs, people who provide sexual services for payment, who today are potential sources of the spread of HIV through these not-so-sterile syringes and needles, and through unprotected sex.

If we do not take extreme measures in terms of providing a systemic prevention, the epidemic can spread over the borders of these groups. The state has no right to turn a blind eye to all this, and to pretend the problem does not exist, and to allow people to simply fend for themselves,

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people who are left to face this very difficult disease and which has very enormous social consequences. Yet it would be also, inadmissible for these people in these risk groups or HIV infected people to be labeled as socially hopeless.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I have always been in favor of, and I still am in favor of a comprehensive approach to this problem, which would take into consideration the interest of all groups of the population, and that the main criterion of quality for the programs that would be applied for treatment and prevention would not be politically correct, but be effective.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: One of the main factors that has an impact on the effectiveness of all measures taken in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in Russia is, in my opinion, the lack, especially at a regional level of a due amount of information and work to be done to enlighten the population that would provide an opportunity to broad sectors of the populations to have objective and credible information about

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HIV/AIDS, the way it is spread, ways to undergo anonymous testing, prevention and get treatment. Here, I see more reserve being shown by the state media, first and foremost in electronic form. They must take upon themselves the burden of being leaders in providing air time for social publicity. For now I see that there is not enough being done when I refer to the proposals that have been made by my colleagues at the state Duma.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: As a positive example of joint work of public organizations and the media, I would like to point out the Russia Media Partnership in fighting AIDS and the campaign Stop Speed that has been conducted. The partnership was initiated by a company called the Transatlantic Partners against AIDS and Gaspra Media within the framework of a global media initiative on AIDS. Today this group brings together 40 Russian media companies.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I would like to say that has been created as a basis to carry out a comprehensive Russia

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wide campaign to counter the spread of the HIV epidemic in Russia. I would like to point out that in the report prepared by the global media initiative for the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the Russian Media Partnership has been singled out as one of the best information projects in this area.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I would like to now talk about something that is of great concern.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: In our country, just as in many other countries –

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: – there is an opinion that among many politicians those who are in these risk groups are violators of rules and laws.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

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MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: That is why it is a better idea to not focus on them, but rather focus on prohibition measures.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: That is why at a regional level, the leaders prefer not to work on these areas, but they want to work on prevention.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Although experienced in practice, many countries clearly show that it is namely the law enforcement agencies that are the main supporters of implementing prevention programs especially in the area of drug users. The programs reducing harm, on the one hand, lead to a lower level of crime in that area. On the other hand, they make it possible for those who have drug addictions to come out of the shadow. This facilitates and enhances the effectiveness of fighting the spread of drugs.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

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MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: In conclusion, what I would like to do is dwell on those areas which I think require active involvement of politicians, which would lead to more effective fight against HIV/AIDS.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: They must be actively involved in national strategies to counter the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: Politicians must and can help in improving and expanding international cooperation.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: At the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg, President Putin had said that what we would have to do is step up work being done on HIV/AIDS.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

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MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: There is one other area where politicians could use their power. That is, involvement of the business community and all business structures and support, including financial as well as events that could be held, measures undertaken in order to try to reduce the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: There is a need to introduce at the federal and regional levels, systems of training and retraining or re-qualification of specialists who have various profiles, such as doctors, teachers and social workers. As well as volunteers in the area of drug and HIV/AIDS prevention, without which it is impossible to have an effective implementation of programs in order to prevent this epidemic.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: In my view, the state today must not only support the capacity that has been built so far in fighting HIV/AIDS, but also play the role of leader and coordinator of all action according to the three following

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key principles. That is, a uniform national strategy, uniformed coordinated body at a high level, and also a uniform national system to monitor and evaluate effectiveness.

FEMALE TRANSLATOR: [English translation]

MICHAEL GRISHANKOV: I would like to thank you for your attention. I would gladly answer your questions, but technical difficulties have it made it difficult in order to continue this discussion, as we would have liked to. Thank you.

[Applause]

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [Russian translation] I am happy to represent my colleague from Ukraine, Irina Borushek. Irina is the member of the Coordination Council of All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV, and also main expert on care and treatment in International AIDS Alliance, main recipient of the Global Fund grant in Ukraine. Irina also represents interest of HIV-positive people in Ukraine in National Coordination Council that is key to the central decision making organization of HIV in Ukraine.

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IRINA BORUSHEK: First of all, I would like to excuse myself because of the crisis situation and because no shift of the session happened. I wouldn't say that the level of my presentation would be optimal, as I wanted it to be.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I would like to speak about how the effective work on preventing HIV epidemic is going under the new leadership and recent changes in the political situation in Ukraine.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: And what is the role of HIV-positive community in this process.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Most of you, many of you, know on how many governments and political leaders have been changed in Ukraine during the recent period.

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ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: But nevertheless, depending on the leadership, Ukraine is still committed to be a leader and show their leadership and commitment to overcome HIV epidemic in the country.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: The key issue to helping this is the partnership and effective partnership between the community of people living HIV national NGO, government, International Donor Institution, and technical assistance foundations.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I would like to underline also, that all these partnerships and all these issues happened only due to the leadership and the commitment to democratic reforms in our country, and transparency processes in decision making.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

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IRINA BORUSHEK: Now we really understand and have an experience to understand what is democracy, what is transparent processes, and what you gain when there is a strong commitment to reforms and leaderships to democratic processes.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I would like to give you one clear example in how it works in one specific area just to underline that a few years ago, a decade ago, it would not be possible at all.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: One of the priorities for advocacy of HIV-positive communities and activists is their openness transparency of the procurement, [inaudible] tender procedures, the most closed and most problematic zone.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Historically, in our health care system and organizational health care, the procurement tender

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processes are the most closed and non-transparent zone, which is completely closed to observers from NGO and People Living with HIV.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: The current corruption processes that have been going in the procurement area were not linked specifically to the minister of health, and have been ruled much on the upper level, so we cannot blame and solve these issues only on the level of the minister of health.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: A few years ago, it was impossible to change somehow the situation, and many of you know, from international community, that a few years ago, in 2003 this was the main course, the corruption practices in procurement was the main course of stopping the Global Fund process in Ukraine and giving out the funding to the International NGO from the government, International AIDS Alliance.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

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IRINA BORUSHEK: Despite that, this system of corruption practices are in clear contradiction to the declared principles of democracy and open as they have been announced by the new leaders of Ukraine, the system is still the same. Change in system is the main challenge when faced with the practical implementation of democracy principles, and principles of transparency.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Maybe we have been lucky and it was part of success in Ukraine that the main investment into HIV/AIDS field of Global Fund round one, was given out to Alliance International NGO based in Ukraine.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: This gives us opportunity to install the transparent and open mechanism, particular of procurement, give possibility for the NGO leaders and particular of People Living with HIV to get involved in the process and to serve there not only as observers, but as experts.

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ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: But since the experience of Alliance has been implemented in Ukraine, the priority for people in Kiev is clear, is building national capacity and ensuring system ability and continuation of the processes and best practices installed in Ukraine.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: We passed quite a long way to reach the situation that we have now, when we have a clear memorandum with the minister of health, all Ukrainian integral people in Kiev have a memorandum with the Minister of Health about partnership and reforming of the tender committee on procurement.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: First of all, we provided the comparative analysis of the pricing in GFATM procurement process in Ukraine and national budget procurement process. We found out that the same masses have been procured by

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national budget with the prices 20 times higher than those in GFATM.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Due to the advocacy measures of All-Ukrainian Network and partnership with the newly appointed Minister of Health we managed to block this tender process, cancel this tender and provide the new tender with the prices adequate to the international pricing policy for our country.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: A lot of the problems were not only due to national tender provided, the same problems and corruption problems have been one of the reasons of stopping the World Bank loan in Ukraine, and now all Ukraine is advocating for renewing the process of, and starting negotiations to get back the World Bank loan to Ukraine.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: For four years, we have been advocating and writing the letters of obligation to include

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representatives of All-Ukrainian Network into tender committee of Ukraine, the key organ in doing and making decisions on the procurement.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: You can congratulate us. We managed to do this.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: We passed quite a complicated process. There were constant attempts of bribing us, and even the frightening and physical frightening of certain activists.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I would like to point out key points of our advocacy [inaudible] that were mainly affected.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

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IRINA BORUSHEK: The key point that, based on the initiative of the minister of health, we provided the meeting with the newly appointed president of Ukraine.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: We had a three-hour working meeting with the president.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Where we actually developed the strengthening of the activities and identified the key priorities and strategies for overcoming HIV epidemic in the country.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: One of the key directions and decision after this meeting was to reform and create a new structure of the tender committee of the minister of health, and we managed to do this. Now this structure, we have a special subcommittee for procurement IVs substitution treatment medicines and TB medicines in the system of the

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ministry of health that has their observers from the People Living with HIV, and which work is based on the principles of transparency and openness.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Also these open procedures are by agreement eligible to the future Global Fund round. Ministry of Health showed their commitment in interest to provide also national procurement, national budget procurements also through this process. Through this open process with PWA, People Living with HIV observers.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: We just finalized the very hard process of writing a new application to Global Fund six round.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: For the Network, the priority for the next round of the Global Fund in this application is basically strengthening the national capacity, reforming the

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national structure to ensure the system's ability of the
Global Fund process after the donors go.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: The key priority is also access to
treatment for the most modularized groups in society, active
IV use, people who are infected with TB and People Living
with HIV.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I just wanted to say that the key
success of the advocacy policy is depending on the commitment
of the country to the democratic processes and openness of
the decision making.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I would like to underline that the
position of HIV-positive activists should be based mainly on
the interests of their communities, needs of the country and
not on the changing policies of the government, of the
political situation, and of a number of international

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organizations because we are now facing the policies of certain international donor agencies and not exactly focused on the interests of the People Living with HIV.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: In the process of Global Fund application writing, we faced every day and every hour with the fact that we need to defend our position in each forum to define the interest of People Living with HIV, despite other interests or priorities of different stakeholders. You can congratulate us, we managed to do this.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: I put in my presentation, presidents and ministers are going away and we are staying. I would like to add that the donors are also coming and going away, but we are staying. Our priorities should be the key priority for all the work that we are doing.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

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IRINA BORUSHEK: I want to just say that our life is
the right that is not determined by the political situation.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK: Thanks a lot.

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [English translation]

[Applause]

ALENA PERYSHKINA: [Russian translation] We are
actually losing dollars due to time, so [Russian translation]

IRINA BORUSHEK and ALENA PERYSHKINA: [interposing in
Russian]

ALENA PERYSHKINA: The translation is that the three
speakers that are not managed to present their speeches
today, they will definitely do this on the 16th. So the
time, Irina said that it is not determined the place, but
anyway, the representatives of the organizing committee will
wait in this hall and direct the people who would like to see
these speakers to any venue that will be determined. So

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those who would like to hear the last presentations on 16th
of August, they come at exactly at this time to this hall and
will be directed. [Russian translation]

[END RECORDING]