

THE KURILE ISLANDS

1. Geographical position

The Kurile Islands are situated between the southern part of Kamchatka and the northern part of Hokkaido. The total number of islands is 56, plus about 14 small rocks. There are 20 large islands, of which 5 are populated. The length of the chain from Kamchatka to the port of Nemuro is 710 miles or 1200 km. The name Kurile comes from the Ainu word "kur" meaning "a man, people, peoples" but the islands are also known as "Chichima" from the Japanese for "1000 islands". The southern islands of Kunashir, Iturup, Shikotan and the Habomai group have an area of 5,000 square kilometres, which is about half of the area of all the Kurile Islands. The first three names are of Ainu origin, but Habomai comes from the place Habomai which is on the Nemuro-Hanto peninsula. The group consists of more than ten small islands and rocks. Nowadays the total population on the southern islands is about 25,000.

There are 160 volcanoes, of which 41 are active and there are earthquakes every day.

2. Brief history of the Islands

When talking about the history of the Kurile Islands, we cannot fail to include Sakhalin island, the history of which is closely connected. Their history is extremely complicated, contradictory and confusing. Firstly, the sources about the history of the islands were not researched objectively; secondly, Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands have been the objects of a serious territorial dispute between the Russian Empire (and the USSR) and Japan over a long period. Because of this many Russian, Soviet and Japanese researchers did not study the history of the islands, so much as look for arguments for their governments in their ancient dispute. Thus Soviet historians paid most attention in searching for proof that "Sakhalin and the Kuriles belonged to our Motherland by the right of first discovery and first exploration, by the right of first opening up and first joining". Everything that did not fit into this picture was ignored, shut out, declared false. Quite naturally it is difficult to believe the objectivity of all this research.

The first documentation about the local people, the Ainu, living on Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands appeared in Chinese geographical treatises at the end of the First Century BC. In the second half of the 13th century Sakhalin began to be an object of Mongol expansion. In the 17th century Europeans began the penetration of the islands. The first was Dutch navigator Maarten Herritsen Vries, whose ship reached the land of the Lesser Kurile chain and Sakhalin island. One of the straits between the islands was later called by his name. Peter the First sent expeditions to the Far East in 1719 and by 1730 Russian navigators had visited the majority of the Kurile Islands. At the same time the exploration of Alaska started (Bering, Chirikov).

3. Russian-Japanese Territorial Claims

If we study the history of the advance and settlement of Russians and Japanese on

Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, we notice a difference of opinions in recognising who opened them up. Moreover they differ not only among Russian historians, but also among Japanese ones.

The historical documents do witness that the opening up of the Kurile Islands by the Russians came from the North and the Japanese from the South. The South of the Kurile Chain is also proved to have been touched by Russians formally, to a considerable extent.

Japanese historian and political scientist Haruki Vada in his book "Thoughts about Northern Territories" writes that to argue who, Russians or Japanese, first opened and visited any of the Kurile Islands, would be senseless, because their primordial inhabitants were Kurilers (Ainu) and the Russians and Japanese were newcomers.

Another specialist in Japanese-Russian relations, Tosiuki Akidzuki, points out that until the end of the 18th century the Japanese did not have any idea about their state border in the north of their country. As for the Adso region, populated by Ainu, they had little knowledge about it and it is unlikely they considered this land theirs. The same could be said about Russians, who headed east to Siberia in search of fur, and by the middle of the 17th century reached the coast of the Pacific Ocean. But there were still no precise borders for the east of Russia.

According to another Japanese version, Russians opened up the Kurile Islands in 1643. Historian Matsunaga wrote: "In 1643 the Russians came to Kamchatka and discovered the Chichima Islands, the name of which they called Kurile and after Bering's voyages they occupied the nearest 21 islands, that is the whole Kuriles. As for Hokkaido, they called it the 22nd island. In Japan even at the beginning of the 19th century Hokkaido was officially considered as the border with Russia."

The same version is supported by another Japanese historian Ēsimitsu Koriyama who devoted more than 30 years to studying the history of Russian exploration in the Pacific Ocean in the 17th and 18th centuries. In contrast to his colleagues he used not only Japanese sources but also Russian archives. He thinks, as well, that Russians bear the palm in opening up the Kurile Islands, claiming that the locals - Ainu, took Russian citizenship in 1778, which is 20 years before these islands were unilaterally declared Japanese property.

According to Russian sources, the subjugation and joining of the islands Shumsu and Paramushir to Russia made the position of locals worse. A yasak - fur-tax - had been imposed. Moreover it was required to pay not only for oneself, but often for the dead and fugitives. To keep the Ainu obedient it was the practice to take hostages. This provoked the flight of Ainu from the islands which were under the Russian sphere of influence. Following fugitives in 1750, tax-collectors gathered yasak from the population of the Middle Kuriles and by 1779 the process of subjugation of the Kurile Ainu was completed by Russians on the whole chain of islands.

However Russia could not keep the islands situated south of Urup. In a very short period it had occupied vast territories, but she was not able to accomplish effective control of them. Kossacks - military people, manufacturers, merchants, behaved on subjugated land as if they were independent from St. Petersburg. In the suburbs of the Russian empire there was unprecedented abuse. Pure robbery, extortion, confiscation of hunting grounds, cruel treatment became the reasons for frequent Ainu riots against the Russians. As a result, in 1779 the Empress Catherine II issued an

order: "Because of difficulties in keeping the subjugated land and abuse, let the hairy Ainu, brought under Russian citizenship, be free and do not demand tax, and also do not force other people, but try to be friendly and kind and continue friendship for the sake of profits in hunting and trade."

In spite of its relative closeness to Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, Japan started the opening up of these islands comparatively late, because of their policy of self-isolation. However, it is beyond doubt that the first information about the islands situated to the North of Hokkaido reached the Japanese long before it reached the Europeans. Only in the 17th century did Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands attract the attention of Japanese explorers, fishermen and traders. The first authenticated Japanese expedition visited Sakhalin in 1635. The first Japanese map of the islands appeared in 1644, and later the expansion to these lands started. Tax began to be received from Ainu and from 1754 the first Japanese trading stations were opened.

In the beginning of the 19th century Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands became the theatre of the first Russian-Japanese armed conflict. The Russian-American Company was given a monopoly in hunting, fishing and fur over a wide area including Alaska, Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands; their sailors eventually destroyed Japanese shops and trading stations on Southern Sakhalin, Iturup and Urup. These self-willed actions were not supported by the government of the Russian Empire. As a result St. Petersburg had to mark the southern border of its possessions in the Kurile Islands. According to a new law for the Russian-American Company issued by Emperor Alexander I in 1821, the last possession on the Kurile Islands was named as the cape of Iturup island. Thus, Japan not only left but secured their positions on Sakhalin and Kurile Islands. From the start the relationship between Russia and Japan became darkened by the problem of territory.

In 1853 a Russian squadron reached Japan to start negotiations about a treaty concerning trade and borders. The talks were carried on in extremely unfavourable conditions coinciding with the Crimean War and were interrupted many times. Only on 7 February 1855, in Simoda, was the first Russian-Japanese trade agreement concluded, according to which the border between Russia and Japan was put between Iturup and Urup. Sakhalin Island was left outstanding. In fact the major part of the island had been settled by Russians: the first military posts and settlements were established, roads were built, coal mines began to be worked. So in 1869 on the southern part of Sakhalin the Korsakov Post was founded and the whole island was declared a hard labour and exile destination for all of Russia.

Nevertheless Japan continued to claim the part of Sakhalin south of the 47th parallel. The Russian government insisted that the whole island belonged to Russia. To solve this problem there were a series of Russian-Japanese talks in 1860-70 which ended in 1875. Japan gave up their claim to the southern part of Sakhalin and in exchange the Russian government ceded the rest of the Kurile Islands to the North of Iturup. A few hundreds of Sakhalin Ainu did not want to accept Russian citizenship and left for Hokkaido. As for the Kurile Ainu, they did not want to leave their islands and so took Japanese citizenship. As for the Russian residents on the Kurile Islands, they were forgotten as usual and it took two years for the Japanese authorities to convince the Russian government to move their compatriots to the mainland - Kamchatka, where they were abandoned yet again.

At the beginning of the 20th century hard Russian-Japanese rivalry for predominance in north-east China and Korea led to war between Russia and Japan. Contrary to

world expectations, Japan in this war was able to wage active and persistent operations, as a result of which Russian troops sustained a humiliating defeat. The Japanese government, realising that the continuation of war with Russia would be beyond their military and financial potentialities, secretly but officially asked the USA to take the initiative for the reconciliation of the two sides. Fearful of further Japanese expansion, President Roosevelt agreed to be a mediator at once. He considered that the best solution for the United States would be a condition of mutual balance between Japanese and Russian forces and not for one side to win. Thus in 1905 in Portsmouth a peace treaty was signed, according to which all previous agreements and treaties were announced to be annulled. The conditions of this agreement included the transfer to Japan of Sakhalin Island to the south of 50 degrees North and not of 47 degrees as it had been before. Thanks to his contribution as a mediator during the conclusion of the peace agreement, Roosevelt won a Nobel Prize.

This Portsmouth agreement was broken in 1920 when Japan occupied parts of the Soviet Far East, including Northern Sakhalin, the Amur Basin and part of the Baykal area. Having occupied Northern Sakhalin, Japan at once started the exploitation of its natural resources. The main attraction for the Japanese was oil. Within 5 years joint-stock companies were established, including Mitsubishi, Okura, Nippon Oil; about 20,000 tons of oil were extracted and 5,500 tons taken to Japan. Japanese firms became the owners of almost all the coal mines, fishing and timber resources in the northern part of Sakhalin. There was a strong sentiment in Tokyo for the transfer of Northern Sakhalin to Japan to compensate for the failure to obtain that territory in 1905.

In previously unpublished papers - made public in 1990 - Dimitri Volkogonov, a Russian historian, found that Lenin had authorised the sale of northern Sakhalin to Japan. The Politburo instructed its chief negotiator, Adolph Ioffe, on May 3 1923, to agree to the sale of northern Sakhalin to Japan for \$1 billion. Ioffe was instructed: "Don't budge. The main condition is cash down, nine-tenths of the whole sum".

Only in 1925, the "Convention on the Main Principles of the Relationship between USSR and Japan" was signed in Peking, which restored the functioning of the Portsmouth peace treaty and gave Northern Sakhalin back to the USSR. In May of the same year the last Japanese soldier left this part of the island and Soviet power returned.

The big influence on Sakhalin was the KGB. The search for enemies started at once. Every year this search increased and became devastating. In the period 1932-38 more than 200,000 people were shot. The KGB paid most attention to the representatives of the local population, Russian old inhabitants, the workers of Japanese concessions, persons of "capitalistic" nationalities (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Polish, German, Latvian and so on). Such a policy of distrust continued up to the perestroyka period, especially on the Kurile Islands.

From 1925 Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands had extreme strategic importance. Possessing them allowed Japan to control the main shipping-routes, which connected the Far East of the USSR with the outside world and to threaten the security of the USA's Pacific possessions. On those islands Japan built numerous military bases and stationed comparatively large military forces (in summer 1945 - up to 100,000 soldiers and officers). But Japan used the Kurile Islands only once - for a very big operation, which had great strategic importance. On 26 November 1941 from the Bay Kasatka on Iturup Island an aircraft-carrier formation set sail to attack Pearl

Harbour.

The Yalta conference took place in February 1945, and because in the dispute with Japan over these islands the Russians attach great relevance to what was agreed there, I should like to dwell on the details. When, at this conference, Stalin said that the Kurile Islands and southern Sakhalin should be returned to Russia, Roosevelt answered (according to a shorthand report), "he felt that there would be no difficulty whatsoever" regarding handing Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands to Russia at the end of the war. But according to the Soviet official press, the President of the USA gave a firm reply that the islands would be handed to the USSR. The Japanese attach no relevance to the Yalta agreement, which was secret; they did not participate in working it out and did not sign it. That is why there is no legal right to say that Japan is bound by its conditions - writes the professor of Hokkaido University, Hiroshi Kimura. An entirely different opinion is held by Russian legal expert Punzhin. He thinks that this document had a legally binding character, but not for Japan, only for the Soviet Union, which was obliged to enter the war against Japan and in exchange the USA and Great Britain agreed to satisfy the conditions of the USSR. After the fulfilment of the obligations by the Soviet side, the USSR had no immediate right to the Kurile Islands, but the right to demand their handing over from the USA and Great Britain, thinks Punzhin. This point of view is shared by many Russian historians still. In short the Kuriles became the Roosevelt "present" to Stalin as the result of political intrigues.

On 8 August 1945 USSR fulfilled its obligation and attacked Japan. It is interesting to mention the detail of Stalin's and Truman's correspondence in August 1945 which was not published in the Soviet press. Stalin asked that Soviet troops be allowed to receive the capitulation of Japanese troops in the Northern part of Hokkaido. In reply Truman said arrangements had already been made for them to surrender to General McArthur, but asked for an air base on one of the Kurile Islands. Stalin gave a sharp refusal - he was furious.

Three days after the declaration of capitulation by the Japanese Government the Soviet Kurile landing operation began. Although Japanese on the Kuriles offered to give in without a fight, the Soviet government preferred to ruin several tens of thousands of lives. Heavy battles took place on Shumshu Island and the rest of them were occupied

without fighting by the beginning of September 1945. The document about the total capitulation of Japan was signed on 2 September. Shikotan and Habomai islands were not considered as Kurile Islands according to Japanese territorial units, and therefore they did not get into the preliminary agreed zone of Soviet occupation, but they were considered Kuriles by the Soviets. At that time nobody paid attention to this fact. About 50-60,000 Japanese soldiers were captured on the Kuriles and transferred to Siberia. They were refused the status of prisoners of war.

On 2 February 1946, by the order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the land, forest, water of Southern Sakhalin and Kurile Islands were declared the property of the Soviet state. It carried out intensified russification of the islands. All geographical names were quickly changed, the mass ideological treatment of the Soviet population started - the true history of the islands was hidden or distorted. Thus in the mid 1940s was born and given wide publicity the thesis "Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands are primordial Russian lands", on which I was brought up. Japanese and the overwhelming majority of old Ainu names disappeared from the map of the islands. A decision was taken to cleanse the islands. In 1946-48 all the Japanese in Southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles were repatriated. Also Ainu and other locals on Sakhalin

were sent to Hokkaido. However the Koreans, brought to Sakhalin in the 20s and early 40s, could not go back to their Motherland, because there was no official relationship with the USSR. Nowadays the islands have the highest proportion of Koreans in all Russia. In Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk it is 10%, the same as Chinese in San Francisco.

Having repatriated the Japanese and local population, the Soviet government organised the mass move of Soviet people to Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. By the beginning of the 1950s the population of Sakhalin region exceeded 700,000. Here I would like to quote an extract from the book by William Nimmo "Japan and Russia", on the state of the Kurile land as a result of its occupation by Soviet troops.

The settlement's (Yuzno-Kurilsk) layout reminds one of a theatre house. The "stalls" down along the lagoon shore, are made up of dreary barracks belonging to a fish cannery. There are rusting ship hulls washed ashore by a storm, and black smoke billowing above a bunch of ramshackle constructions which can hardly be called homes. In fact, they are shacks made of boards, pieces of iron, with scraps of fishing nets serving as fences.

These "stalls" are home to 419 families. However, officially, there are only a handful of people living there, because the houses have been given up as useless decades ago. They have been written off and not registered or even mentioned in any official documents. Every year, about a dozen of these squalid houses are torn down. New houses can't be built here because the street is barely above sea level.

For 45 years people have lived here like barbarians. In Kunashir the crematorium was dismantled and the bricks were used to build a bakery. Magnolias were cut off, depots were blown up, forests were crushed with tank tracks, lakes were poisoned with diesel fuel, the Buddhist monuments which stood like guardians of peace along the shores were blown to smithereens with dynamite. "Make hell out of it," commanded chiefs with and without shoulder straps. "Come on, boys, make sure that not even the Japanese spirit be left on sacred Soviet soil."

They eradicated the spirit. And submerged into squalor. Into the concrete of fire emplacements and the barbed wire of restricted zones... Not merely squalor. But horrible squalor.

With the beginning of the cold war, the USA and Great Britain, who so easily agreed to give the territories which did not belong to them in exchange for the USSR entering the war against Japan, suddenly changed their attitude. Thus during the San Francisco peace conference (September 1951) when the Soviet delegation demanded to include in the text of the peace treaty with Japan an article stipulating the recognition of sovereignty of the USSR over Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, the demand was not taken into account. The San Francisco Treaty text did include denial to Japan of all rights and claims to the Kurile Islands and the part of Sakhalin, the sovereignty of which Japan was given by the Portsmouth treaty. However it was not said in whose favour Japan refused the named territories. It was not stated what was meant by the name "Kurile Islands". As a result the Soviet delegation refused to sign the San Francisco peace treaty. Everything gave the Japanese delegation an opportunity at the end of the conference to raise the question about the return of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and Habomai islands. Such an outcome of the conference was later appreciated by Russian political scientists as a "rude mistake" or a "serious error" in

the diplomacy of Stalin and Gromyko. Also an interesting opinion on this problem was given by N Khrushchev:

"There is need to do justice to the Americans. When the project of a peace treaty with Japan was prepared, there was a place for us too to sign. All our interests were taken into account. The only thing that we had to do was to sign the treaty. Then everything would fall into place and we'd get everything we had been promised. Also we would restore our relations with Japan and could send our diplomats to Tokyo.

"We should have signed the treaty. I don't know why we didn't do this - probably because of vanity, but first of all that Stalin overestimated his abilities and the extent of his influence over the United States. He... refused to sign the treaty... We have to have a more sober view, opinion on these events. When we refused to sign the treaty, it was clear who had won. That is what the Americans wanted, that was in their interests. They wanted to isolate us... So, we swallowed the bait and gave them the pleasure because of our short-sightedness.

"Because of the absence of relationships with Japan our economy and politics have suffered".

Trying to correct the previous mistakes, on 19 October 1956 in Moscow there was signed a joint declaration between USSR and Japan, which included the agreement of the Soviet Union to hand over the Shikotan and Habomai islands to Japan. But because Japan signed in 1960 an Agreement about mutual co-operation and security with the United States and gave them the right to use their military forces in any region of the Far East from the territory of Japan, the Soviet government refused unilaterally to implement the Moscow declaration. From a legal point of view this action seems dubious. Later the Soviet government repeatedly claimed that there was not any territorial problem between the USSR and Japan, that the question about borders was solved once and for all in Yalta and San Francisco. After 1960 the Japanese government moved away from the Moscow Declaration and started persistently demanding not only Shikotan and Habomai islands, but also Kunashir and Iturup.

In 1969 the Ministry of Education of Japan took the decision to mark on school maps all Kurile Islands as Japanese territory. The southern four were blue and rest of the islands were white, trying to underline that there was no final decision about the belonging of the named islands to the Soviet Union and that this question should be considered unresolved. Since 1971 each 7th of February is celebrated in Japan as a Day of Northern Territories. A special fund was established for developing the Nemuro region - the centre of the movement for returning the Kurile Islands. All Japanese since childhood are subject to great patriotic pressure. Numerous social marches, meetings, boat trips are organised along the Soviet border. On Cape Nosappu was built a whole complex of buildings for pilgrims, including a 98 metre high observing tower and museum. There are popular melodies, postage stamps and match box labels, even tea cups with appeals to return the islands. On the roads of Hokkaido there are lots of slogans like "Give the Kuriles Back!" It has become a local industry.

In 1963 a Soviet-Japanese treaty allowing Japanese fishermen to catch sea-kale in the region of the Habomai Islands was concluded. The Southern Kuriles is the only source in the world of sea-kale and precious crabs. However Japanese fishermen abused the law and have been fishing in Soviet waters. Bit by bit the islands began to grow crowded with confiscated Japanese fishing boats, in which I used to play with my friends. In the late 70s Moscow refused to continue negotiations for a peace treaty with Japan but also took an aggressive position regarding fishery negotiations and fortification of the Kurile Islands. At this time Japan was loudly complaining about

the Soviet military build-up on these islands, including Shikotan, which had not been militarised since 1960. In 1978-79 the Soviet Union again stationed its ground forces on Kunashir, Iturup and Shikotan islands, about a division in size. Hiroshi Kimura, professor at Hokkaido University, thinks this was probably for the following purposes:

1. To improve the military-strategic position of the USSR toward the United States of America;
2. To remind Japan and China about its existence and to limit their freedom of action. This was the reaction of the USSR to the conclusion of the Japanese-Chinese peace treaty.
3. To stress its refusal to return the four islands;
4. To create a threat to Japan.

And it is true that at that time Japanese people felt a "Soviet threat", especially after the USSR's military intervention in Afghanistan.

Here is a description of the islands from the 1986 book by Daniel Rees "The Seizure of the Kurile Islands".

"The most obvious indicator of the strategic importance of the Kuriles is seen in the manner in which the South Kuriles (and Shikotan) have been built up by the Soviets in the past decade as an operational base for the air, sea, and electronic surveillance of Japan. Japanese sources indicate that the superbly sited Broughton Bay on Shimushir island, in the central Kuriles, has been turned into an important base for Soviet anti-submarine operations in the North Pacific. The Japanese press also report a continuing program of Soviet airfield construction on Iturup island.

"The Kuriles in general are increasingly dotted with weather posts [in one of them my parents worked], radar stations, and specialist garrisons which act as a necessary military infrastructure for the projection of Soviet power in the region. The Kurile Straits are of vital interest to the ever-growing Soviet Pacific Fleet. As a result of these cumulative factors, the Kuriles are now more heavily - and more effectively - fortified than ever they were during Japanese rule."

With the coming of Gorbachev to power and his famous perestroika, the Japanese raised their spirits and hopes for the resolution of the long-standing problems between the two nations. Relations between Tokyo and Moscow continued to grow more cordial in January 1990 when Gorbachev, in remarks at the Kremlin, told former Foreign Minister Abe Shintaro that the territorial issue "involves your country's sovereignty. You have an inherent right." Although this was the most encouraging statement ever made by a Soviet leader, it still did not involve any firm commitment, and later, during his visit to Japan, Gorbachev dampened Japanese expectations when he said that the Soviet Union had "no land to spare." Thereby he abandoned the principles of "new political thinking" and used the principle of "old thinking" in order to stay in power. The Soviet side could only offer to resume the issuing of permission for the Japanese to visit the places of their relatives' burial on the Kurile Islands (in the 1970s Brezhnev's leaders suddenly changed their policy and took a much tougher position - they did not accept this tradition), cooperation in mutually advantageous economic activity in that region and the reduction of the military contingent on these islands. As for the reduction of the troops on the islands, it was only done partly.

With the appearance President Yel'tsin on the political arena, the territorial question had become more complicated. At first he was ready to make concessions to Japan and even worked up a 5 stage plan for solving the question and taking into account the interests of local population. However the President's feeling of self-preservation came into play. In August 1990 Yel'tsin arrived on Kunashir (and nearly crashed because the airfield had needed repairing for tens of years) and said: "This land has so many resources and so can't be given to another country." In February 1991 visiting Kaliningrad, he said: "We are not going to give the Kurile Islands back, let alone Kaliningrad." The postponement of his visit to Japan in September 1992 was extremely unexpected and unpleasant news. The cancellation of the visit in a unilateral way with only four days' notice was an unprecedented act in the practice of diplomacy. All hopes that after a long period of coolness in Japanese-Russian relations, a new era of their development would open, had failed. Just during Yel'tsin's rule the movement for the defence of these islands has started. Deputies, doctors and professors, residents of the Kuriles have been writing to the Duma. The Moscow Committee for Defence of the Kuriles was set up, which has been sending letters not only to the President of Russia but also to the ambassador and prime minister of Japan. People became hostages of the unsolved territorial problems. Life on the Kuriles is as if stopped: the supply of oil products has stopped, the airport has closed, salaries are not paid, the supply of food is very bad, the death rate and criminality have increased and so on. At the beginning of 1994 the residents of Yuzhno-Kurilsk region wrote 18 times for help to the regional administration, to the Russian government and to the President personally. The islanders feel abandoned by the Russian government once again.

There were many in the region and in Russia who pinned their hopes on economic cooperation with Japan (credit injection), but the promises from the Japanese side are just promises, because the latter hoped for a resolution to the territorial problem. Now however, Japanese diplomats have taken a stance in the relationship with Russia, separating economic questions from political.

4. Brief information from recent regional newspapers

At the end of January 1998 in Moscow an agreement was signed about some aspects of cooperation in the sphere of hunting of sea-living creatures. The residents of the islands were bewildered that the Russian text of this agreement referred to the Lesser Kurile chain using the Japanese name of Habomai islands. The governor of the region wrote a letter to the Russian government, in which he protested against the use of Japanese names. **Russian islands have Russian names**, he said.

As for the agreement, Japanese fishermen for the first time in post-war history will get the right to fish near the disputed islands, extracting 2,252 tons of sea products during 1998. The hunting of crabs will not be allowed. In 1998 Russia will be paid 20 billion yen (154,000 dollars) cash and 15 billion yen (more than 115,000 dollars) in the form of supplying fish-hunting equipment for operations within the 12 mile zone of the Southern Kuriles.

On 4 February 1998 the regional administration discussed the results of the past year. The figures were deplorable: the rate of poverty was 51%, at that time the rate in Russia was 21.1%. Of 621,400 Sakhalin and Kuriles residents more than 300,000 could not make ends meet. In all areas of industry and agriculture there is falling production in relation to 1996. The coal mines are closing, timber industry is cut

down. In concluding his report the governor of the region said: "The main question is what is the future of Sakhalin and the Kuriles? Shall we stay here, shall we raise our children? Apart from optimism we should prove to each resident the seriousness of our intentions, and take all measures to get out of this critical situation".

5. The Future of the Kuriles

I went to Moscow a month ago and I managed to interview the manager of the department for broadcasting to Japan at the radio station "The Voice of Russia", Mr Levin. I asked him what was his opinion in the dispute about the islands and what was the latest in this situation.

He said: "The opinions on this question in Russia are divided into two groups. Some, so called the patriots, are categorically against the handing back of the islands. The others, liberally inclined scientists - Japan experts, my friends and I, diplomats - are for solving this problem in favour of Japan and putting an end to this dispute, because these islands really belong to it lawfully, based on the Declaration of 1956. But nobody will decide nowadays to give these islands back, and the Duma would not ratify this question. Mr Lukin - the chairman of a committee of the state Duma, quite a liberal person, talks about territorial integrity and if the islands are given back, that would be an offence against the Constitution.

"At the formal summit in Krasnoyarsk last November, Yel'tsin and Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto agreed to work towards concluding a peace treaty by 2000. However any peace treaty includes a question about borders. Earlier Japanese were stuck to the theory of inseparability of economy and politics, now they are more flexible. They try to find answers to many questions, to soften sharp corners in every way. Currently Yel'tsin and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia have suggested joint ownership of the islands. In Russia there are economic opponents, because this is the richest place for fishing. The handing back of the islands will cause the loss of the whole economic zone. The talk is now about solving this problem gradually, probably in another generation.

"At the meeting in Kawana in April this year Mr Hashimoto brought up certain reciprocal proposals. Our diplomats refuse to talk about them; his proposals are for the purposes of discussion. Another summit is planned, maybe in the autumn, in winter. There was organised a group at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work out a peace treaty. Moscow has already been visited by Japanese representatives at the deputy level. In one word, Japan is responding. It has been seeking different variants. For instance, the Hong Kong version was suggested, that is Russia accepts no sovereignty over these islands, but retains the right to use them for 50 years. But you can't expect that negotiations will be completed soon - there is strong opposition in the Duma. For the present the guiding line is 2000."

Bibliography

Books

- Bondarenko O.* - Neizvestnyye Kurili. Moskva, 1992
Eryomin V. - Rossiya - Yaponiya. Territorialnaya problema: Poiski i resheniya. Moskva. "Respublika", 1992
Kimura, Hiroshi - Kurilskaya problema. Kiev. "Yurinkom", 1996
Krashennikov S. P. - Opisaniye zemli Kamchatskoy. Moskva, 1994
Latyshev I. N. - Pokusheniye na Kurili. Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1992
 National Geographic, October 1996, p.48-67
Nimmo, William F. - Japan and Russia. A Re-evaluation in the Post-Soviet Era. Greenwood Press. Westport, Connecticut. London, 1994
Polevoi B. P. - Pervootkryvateli Kurilskikh ostrovov. Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1982
Rees, David - The Soviet Seizure of the Kuriles. New York, 1985
Segal, Gerald - Normalizing Soviet-Japanese Relations. London, 1991
Senchenko I. A. - Iz istorii formirovaniya russko-yaponskoy granitsy. Moskva. "Moskovskiy universitet", 1994
Vysokov M. S. - Istoriya Sakhalina i Kuril v samom kratkom izlozhenii. Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1994
Ilanoy V. K. - Russkiye Kurili - istoria i sovremennost'. Moskva, 1995

Newspapers

- Gubernskiye vedomosti, 27.02.1998
 Sovetskiy Sakhalin, 24.12.1997
 Sovetskiy Sakhalin, 13.01.1998
 Sovetskiy Sakhalin, 31.01.1998
 Sovetskiy Sakhalin, 06.02.1998
 Sovetskiy Sakhalin, 28.02.1998
 Svobodnyy Sakhalin, 04-29.01.1998