

Anna Przeperska-Kochaniak, Poland

Michal Przeperski interviewed his mother, Anna Przeperska-Kochaniak, who was pregnant in the spring of 1986. While she trusted the official statements at first, she believes that distrust towards Russia is an unexpected outcome of the Chernobyl disaster.

### **Family background**

Anna Przeperska-Kochaniak was born on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1960 in Łódź in a worker's family. In 1980 she took up studies in Bydgoszcz at the Agricultural Academy from which she graduated in 1985. In October that year she married Jacek Przeperski and moved to Grudziądz, the place she has been living in since then. In the early months of 1986 she worked in the Agricultural High School in Grudziadz as a teacher. Nowadays it is a matter of past, because she retrained herself to become a psychologist in the Grudziadz hospital. Her social environment in 1986 also varied from the one at her home, because she entered intelligentsia environment instead of the worker's one.

In the spring of 1986 she got to know that she got pregnant, so in April 1986 she already expected her first child. She claims that the child was the most important person in her life in the beginning of 1986, together with her mother, husband and mother-in-law. At the time she was mostly concerned with the future of her and her family because, in fact, it was the real beginning of her adult life.

### **Attitude to nuclear energy before Chernobyl**

The knowledge about nuclear energy was accessible to her mainly at school. She was taught that Poland has one experimental nuclear reactor placed somewhere near Warsaw. She was to a large extent indifferent to that problem, yet she was also of the opinion that nuclear energy could have a positive impact on the development of science or economy. The latter was probably mostly thanks to the journal "Problemy" (*Problems*) which published articles on the topic of nuclear energy showing it in the best light, omitting potential threats.

### **The Chernobyl accident and its consequences**

She got to know about the accident from the mass media. Initially there was information what something wrong happened in Chernobyl, yet it has little to do with the Polish reality. She claims that she believed in the enunciations of the communist power and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1986 she went for a walk with her husband. The date is particularly important because it was probably that time when the radiation over Grudziądz was the highest. She remembers that the people employed in the health care sector and youngsters were told to take iodine in order to protect their thyroids.

Only after some time, when more information in mass media showed up she took suspicion that the reality might not necessary be as it was presented. She also searched for information in encyclopedias and academic books in order to get to know how harmful the radiation might have been.

She claims that in course of time she increasingly distrusted official media enunciations about the catastrophe. Also Soviet power was very much distrusted. The issue was disputed within the circle of family, but she also thinks that most of the people (including her

acquaintances) were unaware of the real threat constituted by Chernobyl accident. And that was the reason why the people pretty rarely disputed it at all. Yet, those feelings were not that much important as her care for the baby. As a matter of fact, it shows that the political aspect was less important for her than the health of her baby and family.

Because of a lack of reliable sources she was not very much conscious about the details of catastrophe and was not very much aware of the consequences that the explosion had for Belarus or Ukraine. Since then she has never had personal contact with a person that suffered from the outcomes of Chernobyl disaster. The only opportunity for her to hear about the people of Belarus and Ukraine were TV programs that appeared from time to time on Polish TV, but mostly from the 1990s on. Again, she claims that the only real direct outcome of the Chernobyl disaster was her increasing care for the baby. She has not cared for herself that much as for the baby as she has never tried a medical check for the potential effects of Chernobyl.

### **Nuclear energy issue**

The issue did not really impact her views. She thinks that the Poles of 1986 did not know enough and only now people are able to realize how great a danger Chernobyl was.

### **Chernobyl today**

Chernobyl constitutes a symbol of a thing that was a real disaster for humanity and it serves nowadays as a kind of admonition to the world. She believes that actually a visible distrust towards Russia is an unexpected outcome of the disaster. Hence, it surprisingly is a very important thing connected to Chernobyl. Another important thing, which is still pretty under researched, is the long-lasting impact that Chernobyl has on the people's health. She did not come back to the history of Chernobyl accident, though, nor is she interested in the current ways of commemoration of the disaster.

Interview conducted on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011