**Aziz**: I would like to welcome Lev Luchko to our Oral Histories project. You will then present your professional status. It's a pleasure. In anticipation of our conversation, I would like to say that this is a conversation, not an interview. The project is called Oral Histories, and we are collecting testimonies. Testimonies of people who have some background, who can talk about our time through the prism of their personal biography. Most importantly, their attitudes towards this time in which we now live. In the future, this will become an important historical source for reconstructing the era in which we live. Tell us a little about your childhood and your background. You are a major specialist in the German language, in German philology. How did you come to the German language?

**Lev:** Thank you for inviting me. I am very pleased to be a participant in your project of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. This is a very serious foundation in Germany, in Russia, in Uzbekistan, in the whole world. So, thank you for the invitation. It is a great honour for me.

I have been studying German all my life. At first, I did it unconsciously, because when you are 7 years old and you are sent to a German school, you don't realise where you are.

**Aziz:** Moscow school?

**Lev:** yes. Moscow school No. 1284, one of the strongest schools. At first, they wanted to send me to an English school, but it so happened that they gave me to a strong school with a German bias.

And from the age of 7 I studied German for 2 hours every day. At first, I hated German. The fact that I would eventually become a German teacher was fantastic for me and for my family. When we answered our homework incorrectly, we would sit outside the classroom door, we were punished like that. But it paid off. I had the choice of becoming a table tennis teacher or a German teacher. And when I started studying at the University, I had a student who was 46 years old. I went to the library one day and the woman there asked me: Why are you interested in German and do you have any clients?

**Aziz:** so you finished school and went to University?

**Lev:** I went to a university of interlinguistics and intercultural communications. A prestigious university.

**Aziz:** has it existed since Soviet times?

**Lev:** Yes, it is Krupskaya University. I have 2 educations: I am a teacher of German and English languages and a diplomat. That's why I was interested in the invitation for an interview, because it's very interesting and relevant to me.

**Aziz**: it is great that you mentioned your professional background. Did you study English in parallel at university?

**Lev:** yes, it was a second language. I recently had an experience at FIFA. I worked there as head of sales for the German line in Russia. It was a very difficult job, because these are tickets, these are big companies. And it was a practice of both German and English. But I am a fan of the German language and everything German, I tell you straight away.

**Aziz**: where did you go to work after graduation?

**Lev:** I have been working since my 1st year of study. I entered higher education when I was 16 years old. I skipped 4th grade. I finished grades 10-11 in one year.

**Aziz:** and that was allowed?

**Lev:** I don't know from what years this practice began in Russia. It was a commercial project. It was very convenient, to finish two grades in a year. But it was hard, of course. For example, I had to learn chemistry for the 10th-11th grade. Or physics. Some people are humanities, some are technical. I'm a humanitarian. I didn't really like technical subjects, but I got a silver medal. I've been playing football since I was 5 years old. I love it very much. I've lived here for 10 months, but I'm already captain of the football team.

**Aziz:** Did you already work in parallel with your studies?

**Lev:** yeah. I had private students. And courses and groups. From the age of 18 I started working at MFSA. There are videos on the internet of me teaching.

**Aziz:** and you were allowed to teach without a degree?

**Lev:** yes, they did. A woman came in and said they were looking for a faculty member. And my teacher recommended me.

**Aziz:** it was a statement of your professionalism. After graduation, do you go to work in a private firm?

**Lev:** my first job lasted 3 months. As a manager at a language school. Then an acquaintance took my place. But that's what we agreed. They told me: Lev, we'll take you on, but after that, anything can happen. The job consisted of making calls, selling, carrying papers, serving coffee. It wasn't exactly what I wanted. Secretarial work wasn't for me. After that, I went into private practice. Then I taught in an Austrian company, to the CEO. Then at RZD, Kaiser, Bosch. I taught German to representatives of German companies. For example, in Bosch, to the director, the HR, security. Why did they need it? Not to speak German, but to understand it. So that if they were sitting in negotiations and had an interpreter, they could still understand what the Germans were saying to each other. They got certificates from me. Russian Railways and Rosneft.

**Aziz:** you have a very wide range of institutions. Did you teach all of these in parallel?

**Lev:** it wasn't a corporate job. It was just teaching. I was working for myself. I worked in that format for a while, and I opened a photo and video studio.

**Aziz:** how did you come to this?

**Lev**: that's a very interesting story. I had a rock band. And we performed my author's music. In Russian, German and English.

**Aziz:** and what did you play on?

**Lev**: I used to play electric guitar. I used to compose music, songs. I have 17 amateur albums, 3 professional albums.

**Aziz**: it's a whole discography.

**Lev**: I performed in 2011 at the Goethe Institute at the Sommerfest. With my German rock. I was even interviewed by a radio channel.

**Aziz:** do you have any preferences, in rock music?

**Lev:** I won't be original. I like Ramstein. But his albums like Mutter. I like different things. For example, zweiraumenwohnung. If we're talking about German rap, there's Torch. Of the newer bands, Silbermund. They say German teachers don't listen to anything, but I really like it. Or German football.

**Aziz:** I love German football too.

**Lev:** for example, people ask you what kind of cars do you like? I like German cars.

German football has been failing lately, but the Germans will get theirs.

**Aziz:** let's hope so. I'm a big fan of German football too.

**Lev:** what team?

**Aziz:** Bavaria.

**Lev:** I love Bavaria too.

**Aziz:** although the Germans themselves criticise that it's a rich club.

**Lev:** Well, things happen, they hit the bar. What can we do? Well, he tried.

**Aziz:** I see that you are interested in German culture in general? German history. And the German language is just a way of learning it.

**Lev:** unlike school, very interested now.

**Aziz:** how did you come up with the idea of opening a photography studio?

**Lev:** When I was recording a rock album, a sound engineer suggested that I open my own studio. His name is Roman and for 15 years he and I had a photography studio. It was very successful. We had rappers, dancers and from different universities. Interesting people came. First, we did it on a free basis, then on a paid basis. I had 70 square metres and we put tables and chairs and opened a school.

 **Aziz:** Did you teach photography?

**Lev:** no, we did interviews there. We helped write scripts, sometimes we took pictures. Usually it was like this, we had a white sofa. A person would sit on the white sofa, coffee and a magazine would be placed in front of him. I would interview him, I would write the questions, I liked it very much.

**Aziz:** where did you post these interviews afterwards?

**Lev:** they are on social media. My spouse is a journalist, a producer, very serious. Both in Russia and in Uzbekistan, Nasiba is very well known. The quality of the picture, the approach, how the question is asked, some points on light I understood it all then. I was selling it. And in parallel with that there was a language school. My own school. I always had the principle of working for myself. For example, the approach where they say You teach from this textbook. That's not the right approach. Every experienced teacher has his own tools for teaching. And you have to trust him.

**Aziz:** I want to show the book. Please comment, is this your author's textbook?

**Lev:** yes, this is my author's textbook. It's published by MSU. This is my fundamental work. The background to my PhD, doctoral thesis. I wrote it myself for four years. It was difficult to start. You sit and think where to start? There's a wonderful textbook by Poremskaya. It's a great German textbook. A lot of people know it. Topics by Yartsev, Morokhov. Zavyalov's Green Book. But they have a drawback. Either they are cool pictures for discussion topics or topics. The way I have thought of it is that I will make a fundamental grammar, so that for a person who will take exams, it will be optimally enough for him. Well it is not suitable for researchers and scholars. It is not Duden 12 volumes. There are keys at the end of my book. The most important thing here is the tables. These tables are the uniqueness of this textbook.

**Aziz:** is this your methodological know-how?

**Lev:** my wife Nasiba inspired me to do this. And when we came to live in Uzbekistan, I feel very good here, I opened a branch of the school here, a German club. There are 275 pages in this book. Here in Uzbekistan I wrote a textbook, which has 80 pages. In the tables I described everything, and people who learn the language say Klass.

I added somewhere there, combined, visualised. Because modern man has very little time. There is a constant overload of information. Even if your wife calls you to eat, you may not hear. What a textbook. There's no time for it. That's why I believe that any science is maths. How long does it take you to reach a level? It depends on the tutor. By standard it takes half a year or 4 months, in fact you can get 2 levels in 3 months. To do this you not only have to meet him and practice the language, but you have to be involved in his family's life. For example, if he is a businessman, there should be a common messenger group with his spouse who should cut cards for him. Or send him a welcome sign, and he'll remember, immediately send him his homework. A real teacher has to build trust, interest in the subject, tou many things. And he has to help. There is a model of teaching that depresses me, it's when people take up teaching and just charge for it, and the person doesn't learn. My approach is this: quickly, clearly, and so that the person should study quickly and achieve their goal.

**Aziz:** that's fantastic. 2 levels in 3 months. That's serious.

**Lev:** thank you. I've had this since high school, not even university. It was very hard to get a 4 at our school. We had to recite articles, declensions, cases. Pronunciations. They told us: Sit up straight.

**Aziz:** I know what it's like to write a textbook.

**Lev:** I wrote for 4 years for 3-4 hours a day.

**Aziz:** You are right, people nowadays have a superficial attitude towards textbooks, they want to be taught quickly. They are bored by the volume of the textbook.

**Lev:** any science is hard to learn. Without pleasure. That's why I made this textbook, so that a person would be in the mood.

**Aziz:** I admire the way you tell it all. It's amazing. You are an enthusiast.

**Lev:** well it's a family influence too. Everyone in my family wrote textbooks.

**Aziz:** can you elaborate on that. I know that you are the grandson of a very big leader.

**Lev:** my grandfather Babashkin Lev Yefimovich. He was Deputy Minister of Finance of the USSR. On my mum's side. He is a fifth-generation Muscovite, and I am a seventh-generation Muscovite. The family wanted me to follow in his footsteps. Since I was 7 years old, I've been recounting the Vremya programme. I always say that I don't like to talk about politics, but I have some opinions. I can analyse things. My grandfather has a lot of works, he has a PhD in economics. He graduated from the Plekhanov Institute, then completed postgraduate studies at Moscow State University. That's where he met my grandmother. He was the director of a financial research institute and then he started working in the Ministry of Finance. He didn't want to go there, he wasn't a careerist. But he was told he had to. My grandmother is an honoured teacher of Russia. She was a candidate of economic sciences. She was a professor at Moscow State University. My mum's a teacher too, I hope she'll soon become an honoured teacher of Russia. He's an honoured teacher at Moscow State University. She's a labour veteran. She has a lot of books.

**Aziz:** what's mum's speciality?

**Leo:** She is a doctor of economics, a Scandinavist. Her country is Finland. She used to speak Finnish very well at one time. She has forgotten everything now. She had articles and gave speeches. My mother, grandmother and grandfather travelled all over the world and read their reports in English.

**Aziz:** and also wrote creative books.

**Lev:** my mum's book was published in large numbers. There's a book called Ethics of Business Success Factor. My grandmother wrote a fundamental book on government regulation. She had four printings, which is very cool. I grew up in that kind of environment. Russia is important. I was born in Moscow. But it's important to mention the other side of my family. This is my grandfather. Vladimir Luchko. He was from Ukraine. He was also an economist. My grandmother Luchko Galina is also an economist. My grandfather was an assistant to the mayor of Smelo in Ukraine. The grandfathers were related to each other even before my parents got married. My grandfather financed the construction of bridges, hospitals in that city.

**Aziz:** and your father?

**Lev:** my father was a nuclear physicist. He was in the business of fighting back. He was in the nuclear research business. Worked long hours at the institute, then did programming. And he was in the business of developing nuclear weapons.

**Aziz:** You have a very interesting family. How did it happen that you chose such a humanitarian field from economics and physics? Linguistics. Whose initiative was it?

**Lev:** it was grandma's initiative. To mould something interesting out of our grandson. I was 7 years old and of course I wasn't asked. Sometimes it felt like I was going crazy. At the dacha in the summer I had to read books in German. They gave me Turbo gum and said for 2 gums you could read for an hour. That was motivation. I don't understand parents who just give a gift. Well, okay, if the child asked to buy a soldier, but I was given gifts with conditions. At the end of the quarter, we look at the grades, and they gave gifts based on that.

**Aziz:** Do you ever regret not choosing this path of your parents, economics or physics?

**Lev:** I've thought about it a lot. But whoever works for the state is an unfree person. Even if he has good relations with his team. A close friend of mine works for the state, so he can get calls at night, he can't switch off his phone. It's a huge responsibility. Any mistake is punished. I had two businesses. In general, I did not want to be a businessman. But it just happened. I didn't choose that path. But my whole family talked me into it.

**Aziz:** I was paying attention to that. I realised it was a conscious choice. Your parents were heavily involved in government jobs.

**Lev:** very dense. They always had political opinions. They discussed it all. Like in Germany, they had their own vision, their own favourite deputies. They read all the newspapers, the articles.

**Aziz:** Deputy Finance Minister of the USSR is a global figure.

**Lev:** the USSR Minister of Finance lived in our flat before my grandfather. He lived there for a year, then he was given another flat and we moved into that flat. So there was discipline. If I had grown up in another family, there would have been no such thing. I was always motivated and I realised my purpose only in the 3rd year. Who I am, what I'm good at.

**Aziz:** it's great that you realised it so early. I understand your motivation now. It was a conscious choice. The choice of a free man who does what he likes.

**Lev**: I've seen my mum or grandmother get upset after a department meeting. Someone had said something wrong. They had their internecine wars there. Well, I had that too. For example, a person came for training. The administrator says he has to pay. He says, "I'll pay you later. There was a lot of heated conversations. I went bankrupt and then got back on my feet. I can say that I have the coolest German club in Russia.

**Aziz:** what did you realise in your 3rd year?

**Lev:** I realised why I went to school. I went there to get grades. I worked and thought that I was already working and getting money and I could buy flowers for a girl or ice cream for myself. Or clothes. My parents still supported me at that time, but I had my own money too. And I will say my opinion that when they say that at 18 children should be kicked out of the house to earn their own money. That's the American model. But if you're a doctor and if he studies and operates on someone. I was like that, I studied and worked. In this case, the family, the state should help. There should be help so that there is no shift in studies. Otherwise, a person will not be a professional. It's important for such critical professions. And for teachers too. This is a separate topic.

**Aziz:** since 3rd year, do you shape your own working day? Your work schedule?

**Lev:** yes, everything was harmonious. I had a busy life and a rock band and football and working at different schools. I didn't think at that time that I would have my own school. I realised that I liked learning. A habit takes a month to form, and mine took 2 years to form. I'm 16 years old, I'm in my 1st year, I have 1000 girls and 8 friends. Studying was hard to think about. I did well in my studies, but the realisation that this was my path came along the way. I was a table tennis coach for my university's national team. I coached the first two years. I was told you're not a master of sports candidate. You can't do that.

**Aziz:** Did you participate in the competition?

**Lev:** I had my first adult category, and I took part in competitions. The first training session went badly. The physical education teacher said. I'll give you another opportunity. Everything went well and this section existed for 2 years. And we took third place in the Moscow region. For me it was a great victory. Played tennis mostly amateurs. There were quite friendly competitions.

**Aziz:** was football just your hobby? Who did you play with?

**Lev:** I wanted to be a footballer all my life. It was my dream. I have been playing football since I was 5 years old. In my grandmother's flat we played football with my grandmother. In Bauman's garden I played football. My spouse and I love this park very much. That's how I developed. Then I started to train for Spartak. But it didn't work out. I have 4 medals in amateur football. Here I play in two teams. In Tashkent. I have adapted very well here. Thanks to my wife and my communication skills. One team I have is Respect, and I'm the captain in Gaspar. Next to us play Beeline, Yermak, Medgorodok. But they're league A, and we're league B. We have a coach, Farhodaka. Tuesday, Thursday we have practice.

**Aziz**: so it's a full team?

**Lev:** we're playing 6 on 6. It's all being filmed. There's a commentator commentating on the matches. There's an officiating crew. There's a medical team. Recently, one player broke his leg, the doctors immediately provided assistance, the commentator is commenting on everything, you can watch the live broadcast at the link. In terms of sport, Uzbekistan are very good. I took part in commercial tournaments in Moscow, the level is completely different. You have spectators here. You have tourniquets in every

park, in every courtyard. That's because of vitamin B and the sun.

**Aziz:** So it was interesting for you to work at FIFA?

**Lev:** very much so.

**Aziz:** Did you go there to work because you had an interest in football?

**Lev:** I was hired there as a freelance consultant. Then they put me in charge of sales. But of the German line. There wasn't a lot of work. Because they are Germans. But when you work with top management, there were some interesting stories.

**Aziz:** FIFA is a colossal organisation.

**Lev:** But it was for the experience. It wasn't a full-time job. I used to go there for a few hours.

**Aziz:** and you have already set up a club in Moscow? What is its concept?

**Lev:** The concept of the club is Deutsch mit Spass . Here in Tashkent it is called LL club, that is Lev Luchko club. In Moscow, I have a network of clubs with German, English, Italian and French. The Italian club is about theatre. That is, in costumes, theatrical productions. In Italian. There were 17, 20 people. There were four native speakers. The French club was a French wine tasting. They were there tasting, socialising, playing board games. My wife is very interested in Italian culture, she loves Italy very much, she is studying Italian now. The Spanish club didn't work for me. I had 2 English clubs, one of them was a business club, the other was just a conversation club. My pride is the German club. I have done 380 events there.

**Aziz:** Did you work there yourself?

**Lev:** yes. The other day I held my 380th event in Tashkent. I opened a free social club

**Aziz:** when was that?

**Lev:** last Sunday. The club is not registered yet. I will be registering it. It's free, it's not commercial.

**Aziz:** that's very interesting. What will you do there?

**Lev:** free communication in German. We will play board games, chat, discuss. We will watch some films. It will be a 2-hour multilateral work. Moreover, every Sunday I will hold a free club. And once every two weeks for sick children. Well, somebody has to do it. Because I believe that knowledge should be shared. It's clear that my grandfather made a very good living. I make good money too. But I realise that it is necessary to share. I also had a social project in Moscow. I won a grant and taught people for free.

**Aziz:** it has to be people with minimal knowledge of German?

**Lev:** even with zero knowledge. They can come and speak in English.

Then I talk to them in English. Without Russian. Without Uzbek. Uzbeks and Russians have come. For the next meeting Germans will come. From September, 2 Germans will come.

**Aziz**: very interesting project. Where does it take place?

**Lev:** in community coffee bar. Taras Shevchenko Street, 34. Every Sunday from 12.00 to 13.30 you can come for free to participate.

**Aziz:** is this your social project?

**Lev:** yes.

**Aziz:** is there a business project?

**Lev:** as part of the social project I will also have commercial meetings. Karaoke in German. Mafia in German. Language weekends. German wine tasting. Preparation for German job interviews. These will be both courses and activities.

**Aziz:** What do you think of German in Uzbekistan?

**Lev:** German is the number 2 language in Uzbekistan. You have a lot of contacts with German enterprises. And there is a lot of investment in the economy from Germany and a lot of exchanges. The Goethe Institute is very active in your country. I think it is developing very much, it should be popularised. That is why I came here, because my wife has projects and my projects. We need to move on and open branches. And where? Uzbekistan is a very fertile land for me.

**Aziz:** so German language has prospects in Uzbekistan?

**Lev:** they are already in the house.

**Aziz:** please tell us how you met your wife? Did it happen in Moscow?

**Lev:** my wife, Fakhritdinova Nasiba, I love her very much. Everything I do, I dedicate to her. I wrote a textbook in Uzbekistan and wrote that I dedicate it to my dearly beloved wife. I have it in the process of printing now, otherwise I would have brought it too. We met in Moscow. On the Internet. We had common interests. Nasiba was interested in producing, journalism, and I have a professional photo studio.

**Aziz:** is she a professional journalist?

**Lev:** She has three college degrees. She is a super professional. She worked here in Uzbekistan on the radio. She worked on television for 10 years. She had different projects. She worked with Shakhnoza Ganieva. She worked with a very respected person, Firdavsaka. Together with her sister she had a lot of projects. Then she moved to Moscow and worked at NTV as a line producer. It's an incredible success. The way she came there, in 11 months she was made line producer. It's unbelievable at all. She was very respected because she was very disciplined. There's a reason she has German blood in her. She's 25 per cent German.

**Aziz:** She speaks German? Just 3 months with your method and you will communicate in German.

**Lev:** she's studying Italian with Petrov's book now. She's very cool and respected here. She was on the Yangi Haet programme about the presidential elections, and she was in charge of it all. Both as casting director and site director. Nasiba is a very active and energetic person. And she inspired me. She said that commercial is commercial, we need to move socially too. It will go very well in Uzbekistan.

**Aziz:** in this respect you have a good co-operation, harmony.

**Lev:** yes, because we are both very impulsive. Very active. Leaders. Italian family.

**Aziz:** I see that you are already very well adapted here.

**Lev:** the first 4 months were hard because I did virtual shops for my school, then I had to get used to the climate, but I really like it here, I am in Uzbekistan for a long time.

**Aziz:** great. And especially if you will develop social projects here and popularise the German language. If you will introduce such methods.

**Lev:** Thank you. You have television projects here that are dedicated to the German language.

**Aziz:** I've seen them. But they're a bit archaic. Maybe I'm wrong?

**Leo:** I didn't go into what's inside. I have an author's video course for A1. On this course one can learn the language in 1 month. That is, in a month he can take the exam. I made a unique product. I've been making it for a year. Filming, interactive whiteboard. I write it, I pronounce it. And the person learns basic topics, grammar. And after taking this course, they pass with an A.

**Aziz:** Great. Amazing.

**Leo:** if I had a big income from the business, I wouldn't leave teaching anyway. I will always need a few students to have some fun. Turning your hobby into your job and enjoying it is what you are meant to do. When I started earning money in my 3rd year, I realised this is my thing, you get paid. When you get paid for it yourself, it's different.

**Aziz:** Let these words be the end of our conversation and a good incentive for people. Because if you can unite your interest with your life's work, that is probably happiness. I am glad that there are people like you who have managed to find a balance and that is very important.

**Lev:** thank you.

**Aziz:** thank you for a very interesting conversation, and I hope you will succeed in Uzbekistan in this very important field. Thank you for the conversation.

**Lev:** Thank you and thank you to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for the invitation. It is a great honour for me.