

## THE FOUNDATION HATED BY PIS RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM THE USA. IT WILL PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW IN POLAND

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The Open Dialogue Foundation will educate secondary school students in Poland in the rule of law, including the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. It's a new idea that was funded by the U.S. State Department through the U.S. Embassy. "If you want democracy, you first have to fight for it and then you have to nurture it," said Katarzyna Szczypka, coordinator of the initiative, in an interview with naTemat.

The project entitled "Democracy fitness: transforming citizens into active stakeholders via exercising democracy" will be launched in September 2020 by the Open Dialogue Foundation.

So, what does it entail? The organisation explains that the idea is to conduct a series of lectures and workshops on the historical roots and functioning of contemporary American democracy, as well as the political structure and constitutional institutions in Poland, amongst other related initiatives.

A total of PLN 87 000 was spent on financing the project, of which PLN 71 000 is a grant from the U.S. Department of State. This was facilitated through the U.S. Embassy in Poland.

Judges from the Iustitia and Themis associations, including former spokesman of the National Council of the Judiciary Waldemar Żurek and spokesman of the Themis association Dariusz Mazur, declared their support in conducting the classes. On the American side, professors of law and constitutionalists were invited to cooperate. All of the classes will be held remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The selection of schools to participate in the project will begin soon. The foundation is planning to reach smaller towns.

### "Democracy fitness" – what is it about?

The coordinator of the project is Katarzyna Szczypka, a former collaborator of Prof. Leszek Balcerowicz at the Civic Development Forum and a holder of a scholarship of the Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity at the Cato Institute think-tank in Washington.

"The rule of law in Poland has been strongly politicised. The rule of law itself is nonpartisan. It is a value that stands above all political disputes and sympathies. Our project is exactly the same. We do not want to get involved in any political disputes," she emphasised in an interview with naTemat.

My interviewee has no doubt that "Polish education does not address this topic sufficiently". Continuing, "there is a need for much better communication about the importance of the justice system, e.g. how courts work and how important the rule of law is for personal and economic freedom," she added.

Katarzyna Szczypka

*The concern of EU institutions over the violations of the rule of law in Poland can be considered as a kind of barometer that indicates a serious problem. But the EU will not solve all our problems. Civil society needs to be mobilised.*

The project coordinator explains that the idea consists of four components. The first includes lectures on the historical roots and functioning of contemporary American democracy as well as the political structure and constitutional institutions in Poland. Other components include simulation of court trials, as well as practical workshops on democratic lobbying, amongst other topics.

However, the most interesting is the idea of creating a virtual 'Democracy Fitness Online' database. "Our plan is to gather basic information about the two democratic systems, Polish and American, and compare them in a transparent way. The database will also include a repository for students, based on the lectures and workshops held, and a repository for teachers, containing source and instructional materials" explains Szczypka.

### **The Open Dialogue Foundation targeted by PiS**

The Foundation and its representatives have repeatedly spoken on the situation related to the constitutional crisis and the violations of the rule of law in Poland by the PiS government. The ODF encourages people to participate in demonstrations, among others, in defence of free courts.

Let us recall that the conflict between PiS and the Open Dialogue Foundation began in July 2017, after Bartosz Kramiec's publication of the text on civil disobedience in the face of "an attack on the independence of the judiciary in Poland".

In August 2018, the PiS government led to the short-term expulsion of the ODF's president, Lyudmyla Kozlovska, from the EU. Ultimately, she was granted permanent residence in Belgium and the Polish authorities had to withdraw her EU entry ban.

**Link:** <https://natemat.pl/314059,fundacja-otwarty-dialog-ma-promowac-praworzadnosc-w-polsce#>

**The original title:** "Znienawidzona przez PiS fundacja dostała wsparcie z USA. Ma promować w Polsce praworządność"