



Warsaw, 17 June 2019

COMMENTARY ON THE SEJM COMMITTEE MEETINGS OF 25 APRIL 2019 AND ATTACKS OF LAW AND JUSTICE PARLIAMENTARIANS ON THE OPEN DIALOGUE FOUNDATION

In connection with the meetings of the Parliamentary Committees for Special Services and the EU of 25 April 2019 at which the issue of our organisation, the Open Dialogue Foundation (ODF), was raised, as well as numerous media attacks by Law and Justice politicians, we would like to refer to the allegations made against us.

On the basis of media reports and analysis of the statements of Law and Justice MPs, their allegations against us can be essentially boiled down to several issues, according to which we allegedly, among other things, have done the following:

1. We have allegedly carried out activity aiming at overthrowing the government in Moldova and other democratic states, including EU countries

As in the case of other post-Soviet states, we support the democratisation of Moldova, where – until the breakthrough changes in recent days – an oligarchic, kleptocratic regime was in power. All power has been concentrated in the hands of Vladimir Plahotniuc, an ordinary Member of Parliament, the leader of the ruling Democratic Party. This is fully confirmed by resolutions and reports of international institutions, including the EU and the Council of Europe. Plahotniuc is widely recognised not only as Moldova's richest person, but also as a person closely associated with organised crime and the main beneficiary of the so-called "laundromat", a huge financial scandal.

In Moldova, we have supported the democratic, pro-European opposition and we are being attacked for this reason. Along with the opposition, we tried to stop international financial assistance in the absence of reforms and in light of serious violations of fundamental rights in Moldova. The attacks on us in Poland were used by Plahotniuc to discredit us. To this end, a special parliamentary committee of inquiry has been set up. The opposition boycotted it completely. The pretence for its establishment was our conference in the European Parliament in 2017,¹ for which we bought airline tickets for opposition leaders. For this reason, we and the opposition were accused of "illegal funding of political parties from abroad". In Moldova, political opponents and whistleblowers who disclose criminal activities of the authorities are being persecuted. European countries, including Germany, are home to Moldovan citizens who have been granted status as political refugees. Talking about Moldova as a democratic state is a gross abuse or cynical legitimisation of the regime. Citing the 2018 report of the Moldovan Parliament is as justified as recognising the Law and Justice party as an authority on the rule of law.

2. We have allegedly collaborated with the Kremlin as Russian agents

From the very beginning, the ODF has strongly and consistently opposed the Kremlin, while it has supported Ukraine. We have worked with the Russian opposition and human rights defenders, standing

¹ <https://odfoundation.eu/a/8172,zaproszenie-na-konferencje-moldawia-na-rozdrozu>

in defence of Russian political prisoners. We assisted whistleblowers revealing corruption within the Russian government. We were the only Polish or European organisation to organise a permanent mission to support Kiev's Maidan in the winter of 2014. We provided medicine, clothing and money to support the Ukrainian revolution. We have sent humanitarian aid worth over PLN 1 million^{2,3} for internal refugees fleeing Russian aggression, as well as famous helmets and bulletproof vests for Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers supporting the former. We have run a large help centre for migrants from Ukraine in Warsaw – The Ukrainian World.^{4,5,6} We are lobbying for the farthest-reaching sanctions against Russia,^{7,8} including personal sanctions against members of its authorities.^{9,10,11} To this end, for many years we have been promoting the adoption of the Magnitsky Act by democratic countries.¹² Along with numerous Ukrainian organisations and European politicians, we are seeking to release more than a hundred Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia.^{13,14} Following the Maidan developments, we have supported Ukrainian reforms and the fight against corruption. We have carried out campaigns against the delivery of French Mistral class warships for the Russian Navy¹⁵ and a high-profile protest against the entry to Poland of the Putin motorcycle gang “Night Wolves”.¹⁶ We have organised dozens of demonstrations of solidarity with Ukraine, rallies against Putin and Russian aggression. Our report on Ukrainian volunteer battalions¹⁷ fighting against Russian aggression in its first period is prohibited in Russia – access to it is blocked by Roskomnadzor (the Russian office for electronic communication).

We believe that it is the Law and Justice party that, by a means of provoking a conflict between us and the EU and Ukraine, weakening Poland on the international arena and destroying our defence potential, is working in the interests of the Kremlin. And in the political struggle, it uses Putin's style and methods – from the extremely conservative rhetoric of defending traditional values, through massive propaganda, disinformation and the use of the entire state apparatus, including law enforcement agencies, to destroy opponents.

As noted by Andrzej Wielowieyski in his article for *Rzeczpospolita*¹⁸ in August 2018, Russia will benefit most from the attack on Open Dialogue.

3. We have allegedly washed dirty (mostly Russian) money

The Foundation's funding is public and legal. Before the Law and Justice gained power and before we issued a statement in defence of the courts, no state institutions had ever had any reservations about us. For years, the list of donors has been available in our reports and on our websites. We have never concealed the fact that the main donors were the president of ODF, Lyudmyla Kozlovska, the Ukrainian entrepreneur Petro Kozlovsky and his family members. In 2014, we were the only non-governmental organisation in Poland to receive a special licence from the Interior Ministry permitting us to deliver

² https://odfoundation.eu/a/5576_podsumowanie-dzialan-fundacji-otwarty-dialog-i-euromaidan-warszawa-na-rzecz-ukrainy

³ https://odfoundation.eu/a/7169_czas-na-podsumowanie-pomoc-dla-ukrainy-w-2015-r

⁴ <http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34862,20291817,ukrainski-swiat-znika-ze-srodmiescia-czy-to-koniec-placowki.html>

⁵ <https://tvnwarszawa.tvn24.pl/informacje,news,pomogli-30-tysiacom-ukraincow-brmusza-sie-wyniesc-z-nowego-swiatu,205859.html>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/13/ukraines-refugees-find-solace-in-poland-europes-most-homogenous-society>

⁷ https://odfoundation.eu/a/8925_sukces-kampanii-savecouncilofeurope-sankcje-nalozone-na-rosje-zostana-utrzymane

⁸ https://odfoundation.eu/a/8069_porozumienia-minskie-stosunki-miedzy-rosja-a-unia-europejska-oraz-znaczenie-nakladanych-sankcji-debata-w-pe

⁹ <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19743530,demonstracja-w-obronie-nadii-sawczenko-domagamy-sie-sankcji.html>

¹⁰ <https://onet100.vod.pl/i/dowiedzcie/czy-europa-uwolni-nadie-sawczenko/ewn560>

¹¹ <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/02/15/ukrainian-human-rights-activists-published-savchenko-list/>

¹² <https://freedomhouse.org/article/house-appropriations-subcommittee-state-and-foreign-operations-urged-increase-global>

¹³ <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/824726,niemiecka-europoslanka-niewpuszczona-do-rosji.html>

¹⁴ <http://fotyga.pl/2016/03/europoslowie-apeluja-o-sankcje-personalne-dla-osob-odpowiedzialnych-za-wiezienie-sawczenko/>

¹⁵ https://odfoundation.eu/a/5251_albo-mistrale-dla-rosji-albo-antyrykiety-dla-polski-demonstracja

¹⁶ <https://www.wprost.pl/tylko-u-nas/504277/nocne-wilki-piec-powodow-dla-ktorych-nie-mozemy-wpuszczic-ich-do-polski.html>

¹⁷ https://odfoundation.eu/a/6441_raport-bataliony-ochotnicze-geneza-dzialanie-kontrowersje

¹⁸ <https://www.rp.pl/Publicystyka/308209911-Uderzenie-w-Otwarty-Dialog-to-sukces-Rosji.html>

protective equipment to Ukraine (according to the law, the trade of helmets and bulletproof vests is regulated on the basis of restrictive provisions regarding weapons). For this purpose, we successfully passed checks by the police, the Ministry of Economy and a number of special services (including the Military Counter-Intelligence Service). For two years, there has been a fiscal inspection being carried out in the Foundation. The inspection was ordered by M. Kamiński and W. Waszczykowski, whose main complaint is ... the wording of the Foundation's statute; the Tax Office in Łódź insists that activity connected with human rights defence should be taxed in Poland.

4. We have allegedly striven to overthrow the authorities (to organise a so-called Maidan) in Poland

It's not true. The Foundation operates in a legal, peaceful manner, focusing mainly on the defence of human rights in post-Soviet countries. In July 2017, Bartosz Kramek published a high-profile article on civic disobedience in the face of an attack on the judiciary in Poland. He did it on his own account, while the Foundation merely published this text on its website and in social media. The author clearly stressed that he only means peaceful activities; he proposed and considered the use of effective methods of civil resistance against a violent constitution of power, strongly rejecting any kind of violence.^{19,20} This led to massive attacks by the ruling camp on the Foundation and a dispute with the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who, as a supervisory body, filed a motion in the court demanding the introduction of a compulsory administration over the ODF. However, he was unable to specify as to what legal provisions he believed we were breaking. The court legitimately rejected his motion in 2018.^{21,22} We regret the scale of manipulation and distortions, but we have no influence on what the pro-government media write and what the Law and Justice politicians say, for example, about the fact that Bartosz Kramek considered in his manifesto of 2017, a general strike by teachers, which led them to the conclusion that he was the true mastermind behind their protest in 2019.

It is worth noting that the use of Maidan as a threat and a bogeyman to intimidate public opinion is a popular cliché of Russian propaganda. The Russian authorities are chronically afraid of the so-called colourful revolutions, and the changes that have taken place in Ukraine in 2014 are a reminder that gives them many sleepless nights. It is significant that a similar perception and narrative (instead of respect for Maidan as a symbol of an effective fight for European freedom and values) has been adopted in recent years by Polish pro-government propaganda, which underlines the democratic legitimacy of power, and constantly accuses opposition circles of wishing to carry out a coup and provoke anti-government riots.

5. We have allegedly used our actions to date to “win credibility” (built a legend)

This is an *ad hoc* theory formulated by Law and Justice in order to justify its attacks on us in the light of the aforementioned inconvenient facts on the actual activity of the ODF. In this way, persons such as MP Małgorzata Gosiewska (who strongly supported Ukraine with us and defended the persecuted activists and refugees from Kazakhstan²³) has defended herself when accused of close collaboration with us. This thesis is absurd, because in the light of this logic, it is not important what good we did – on the contrary, the more we helped Ukraine, the worse our situation is: by their logic, the more effectively we built a legend, the better secret agents we are. It is as difficult to argue with this as it is to ‘prove you are not a camel, as the Russian proverb says. However, we wish to emphasise that such reasoning was typical of the Inquisition and of Stalinist proceedings. If there is no evidence, the culprit is an even worse perpetrator, because he is also guilty of concealing or destroying the evidence. If facts and common

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/bartosz-kramek/niech-pa%C5%84stwo-stanie-wy%C5%82%C4%85czmy-rz%C4%85d/10155402239540772/>

²⁰ <https://odfoundation.eu/a/8242,oswiadczenie-fundacji-otwarty-dialog-z-dn-21-07-2017-r-ws-demontazu-rzadow-prawa-w-polsce>

²¹ <https://odfoundation.eu/a/8630,otwarty-dialog-znow-wygrwa-z-msz-nie-bedzie-komisarza-resort-nie-przejmie-kontroli-nad-fundacja>

²² <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,23442499,dobra-zmiana-liczona-w-ziobrach.html>

²³ <https://dziendobry.tvn.pl/a/aleksander-orlow--mafia-wziela-go-na-celownik>

sense fail to prove guilt, the worse the culprit's situation, because according to the logic of the Inquisition, this attests to an effort to hide tracks and build an alibi.

Nevertheless, one thing needs to be emphasised: ODF's activities are consistent and our "manifesto" line has not changed: we are pro-Atlantic, pro-European, anti-clerical, we fight against the abuse of authoritarian and corrupt regimes, we defend the rule of law and persecuted people. Unfortunately, the situation in Poland and, partly, in the world, where even the oldest democracies are coming to terms with a wave of primitive populism and nationalism, has fundamentally changed.

6. We have allegedly been promoted by politicians of today's opposition

Over the last few years, we have cooperated with politicians of various political options, such as PO (The Civic Platform), Ruch Palikota / Twój Ruch (Palikot's Movement/Your Move), Law and Justice, and Solidarna Polska (United Poland).²⁴ During the Maidan and the first months of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, we met with Paweł Kukiz. At that time, Paweł Kukiz was one of the eager advocates of support for Ukraine.

Before the escalation of the constitutional crisis in Poland, achieved by Law and Justice by means of usurping competences unknown hitherto to the constitution for the parliamentary majority, the government and the president, we also had friends and partners in today's ruling party. This was changed after the statement in the defence of the courts issued by Bartosz Kramek and published by the ODF in the summer of 2017. Until then, we had cooperated with many Law and Justice / United Right Wing members who were involved in our efforts to defend human rights in the East. They included Adam Lipiński, Małgorzata Gosiewska, Tadeusz Woźniak, Krzysztof Maciejewski, Piotr Pyzik, and Michał Dworczyk. They participated in the observation missions organised by us in Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan. Together, we supported the protesters in Maidan, organised humanitarian aid, and rescued a Polish citizen, Aleksander Orlov, who had been held in a detention centre in Odessa for many years. We could count on their support in defence of political refugees and their relatives, and on help in obtaining protection and asylum for them on the territory of the Republic of Poland.

For many good causes, they cooperated – above everyday divisions – with representatives of other groups. Although everything changed in 2017, we do owe them respect and gratitude for this.

In the European Parliament, Anna Fotyga worked intensively with us, fighting the influence of Putin, Nazarbayev and Plahotniuk, and our initiatives were supported, among others, by current president Andrzej Duda, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Marek Jurek, Beata Gosiewska, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (the then Civic Platform member), who often had speeches in parliamentary interventions or filed Written Questions to the European Commission.²⁵ This concerned the defence of the Ukrainian Kremlin prisoners (such as Nadia Savchenko and Oleh Sentsov), as well as political prisoners (such as Vladimir Kozlov) and political refugees from Kazakhstan (such as Mukhtar Ablyazov and a number of people from his circles).

In this context, we can only express our regret over the amnesia of the aforementioned politicians and draw attention to the hypocrisy of their – and their party colleagues' – attack on the Civic Platform (PO) parliamentarians and MEPs cooperating with us in the same way.

7. We have allegedly defended suspected oligarchs and financial criminals

The Open Dialogue has always stood in defence of dozens, even hundreds, of people persecuted for political reasons in post-soviet countries – most often political prisoners and refugees.

²⁴ <http://slowopolskie.org/posowie-pis-i-twojego-ruchu-sprobowali-spotka-si-z-wizion-w-rosji-nadij-sawczenko/>

²⁵ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2014-007824_PL.html

It is worth bearing in mind that some of them (such as Mukhtar Ablyazov and a number of people associated with him) have themselves become victims of propaganda and disinformation; they are struggling with many allegations and other attempts to discredit them on the part of autocratic regimes, and sometimes Western structures, working on their orders (PR agencies, law and lobbying offices, former heads of states and governments employed as high-paid advisers, paid journalists, corrupt officials and officers).

However, it is not our role to act as their press spokespeople or to explain some points of their resumes. We defend basic principles such as the right to a defence and a fair trial, and to freedom from torture and ill-treatment. We do not issue a certificate of integrity to persons with whom we deal, but we have humanitarian aspects in mind – their health and life are often at stake.²⁶

In practice, ignoring the huge number of people and numerous topics that we deal with,²⁷ we are most often subject to accusations on account of helping three people: Kazakhstani oppositionist Mukhtar Ablyazov, Moldovan entrepreneur Vyacheslav Platon and Russian whistleblower Nail Maliutin.

In addition, Amnesty International,²⁸ Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), American Senators Joe Lieberman and John McCain, Russian oppositionists and human rights defenders (including Garry Kasparov²⁹ and Lev Ponomarev), the European Parliament (in a resolution of 2003), dozens of MEPs³⁰ (including PiS members³¹) stood in defence of Mukhtar Ablyazov, who is persecuted in Kazakhstan (imprisoned and tortured in 2002) and threatened with extradition to Russia (during his period in French extradition custody in 2013–2016). In December 2016, the French Council of State finally blocked his extradition, considering it politically motivated.³² Ablyazov, currently in exile, is the patron of the civil society movement Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, whose activists have been organising mass protests in the country for many months, demanding free elections and cessation of oppression.

Our involvement in the case of the Moldovan businessman Vyacheslav Platon, on the other hand, was a relatively short, several-month-long episode and was in no way related to his suspicious entanglements (such as the famous scandal of the so-called “laundromat”). It was purely about a drastic violation of law by the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. This man was deprived of Ukrainian citizenship virtually overnight and his extradition to Moldova was carried out without trial. One could justifiably assume that it was done at the personal request of Vladimir Plahotniuc (a friend with the President of Ukraine), because, in the summer of 2016, Platon declared that he would testify against Plahotniuc, who is considered to be the largest beneficiary of the laundromat scandal. We perceived the same scenario and dangerous precedent as a potential threat to Mikheil Saakashvili,³³ who at the time was beginning to come into conflict with President Petro Poroshenko. As it turned out over time, we rightly anticipated the risk of depriving him of a Ukrainian passport. Of course, all this does not in any way erase Platon's liability for his actions and we have always emphasised that. It is significant, however, that with the intensity of our commitment and efforts to support the rule of law in Moldova and the struggle with Plahotniuc's regime, our adversaries, including Law and Justice politicians, reduce everything to the “defence of a dirty oligarch”. This is another twisting of the facts.

Nail Maliutin was a whistleblower whom we began to defend – at the request of his wife – in 2016 (his case was another example of political abuse of INTERPOL and extradition) as a man revealing corrupt practices in Russian authorities (similar to Sergei Magnitsky). Following the discovery of irregularities in

²⁶ <https://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1079343,Ekstradycja-do-Rosji-to-wyroek-smierci-dla-Abliazowa>

²⁷ <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/ludmila-kozłowska-czy-jest-rosyjska-agentka/rgx0gf8>

²⁸ <https://amnesty.org.pl/francja-musi-zapewni%C4%87-bezpiecze%C5%84stwo-kazachskiemu-opozycjoni%C5%9Bcie/>

²⁹ https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2014/11/05/la-justice-de-poutine-dans-un-tribunal-francais_1136977

³⁰ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2014-007406_PL.html

³¹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2014-007824_PL.html

³² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/10/france-blocks-extradition-kazakh-oligarch-mukhtar-ablyazovto/>

³³ <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/7978,ukraine-assists-post-soviet-states-with-the-persecution-of-political-opponents-and-refugees>

the company he managed, he commissioned an audit and submitted a crime report to the Russian law enforcement agencies, and after ineffective pursuit of justice in Russia, he filed a report with the prosecutor's office in Germany. Maliutin's reports and testimonies struck at the people and interests of Igor Yusufov, a member of Gazprom's Board of Directors, former energy minister, and Dmitry Medvedev – prime minister and former president of the Russian Federation.³⁴ His wife addressed us for help in stopping his extradition from Austria to Russia. Unfortunately, it was one of the few cases in which our efforts in this area proved ineffective.

8. We have allegedly been exposed by *The Sunday Times*, the Moldovan parliament and the Internal Security Agency

For a long time, we have been objects of numerous media attacks by (among others) authoritarian post-Soviet regimes, Russia, Kazakhstan and, until recently, Moldova. The suspicious circumstances of the production of the article in *The Sunday Times*, and in particular the disturbing profile of the authors, have been described in detail in articles by Onet³⁵ and *Gazeta Wyborcza*.³⁶ Contrary to the stubbornly repeated statements of numerous Law and Justice politicians and the majority of the media working for this party, the *Sunday Times* article itself does not present any new theses, nor does it give credence to the existing ones; it merely quotes the Moldovan report quite extensively. The nature of the article's content, along with information about the very dubious credibility of the Moldovan sources and the support of the Foundation's activities by several British MPs and MEP Julie Ward, all point to the fact that all we are facing are assumptions and accusations. It does not contain any new information – it is based entirely on reports issued in Moldova then duplicated by the right-wing media in Poland (in fact, the *Sieci* weekly in 2018 wrote exactly the same). Of course, we perceive the publication itself negatively, as based on false information and giving grounds for further insinuations. For this reason, in cooperation with British lawyers, we have taken appropriate steps to remove the consequences of violations of our personal rights.

The publication appeared in the Scottish edition of *The Sunday Times*, which has a separate editorial office from *The Times*. Both publications are part of the news corporation belonging to the American billionaire Rupert Murdoch, who also controls the conservative American TV Fox News. Fox News is known for its numerous controversies, including far-reaching support for the incumbent US President Donald Trump and for the American right wing through the extreme vulgarisation of journalistic content. Although *The Sunday Times* is part of the so-called “quality press” (i.e. a press that publishes reliable information – unlike tabloids), it should not be treated as an oracle. The piece has not avoided high-profile scandals; it was one of the beneficiaries of materials obtained as a result of illegal wiretaps and bribes given by journalists in the scandal of the tabloid *The News of the World*, also owned by Rupert Murdoch. Also, we cannot disregard the circumstances related to the appearance of the aforementioned article.

The *Sunday Times* article devoted to us was received critically and with surprise by the journalists of *The Economist* weekly and the American portal The Daily Beast, which described it in a publication with the very appropriate title “How the Russia friendly far right demagogues of Europe buy and bury the press”³⁷ by Michel Weiss, a propaganda and disinformation specialist associated with the Atlantic Council, writing, among others, about the Russian information war against the West.

Regarding the findings of the Internal Security Agency, we seem to be able to sufficiently depend upon the visa and residence decisions of other European countries, and the final blow to the Internal Security

³⁴ <https://odfoundation.eu/a/7622,raport-sprawa-naila-malyutina>

³⁵ <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/autorzy-artykulu-sunday-times-atakujacego-polska-fundacje-to-szef-agencji-pr-i/nygbff1>

³⁶ <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,24709867,w-zwalczaniu-fundacji-otwarty-dialog-pis-utworzyl-wspolny-front.html>

³⁷ <https://www.thedailybeast.com/heres-how-the-russia-friendly-far-right-demagogues-of-europe-buy-and-bury-the-press?ref=scroll>

Agency's credibility seems to have been dealt by the court's last decision, which considered its documents "very general" and insufficient to justify the entry ban on the ODF president Lyudmyla Kozlovska. The court clearly stated that in the light of documents presented by the Head of the Office for Foreigners (which was based on a classified opinion of the Head of the Internal Security Agency), Lyudmyla does not pose a threat to the security of the state. In connection with the above, we envisage taking legal steps to protect our personal rights.

For more detailed information, please contact us:

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See also:

- Onet.pl: "The authors of the Sunday Times article attacking the Polish foundation are the head of a PR agency and Brexit portal worker" (24.04.2019): https://www.onet.pl/?utm_source=odfoundation.eu_viasg_wiadomosci&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=leo_automatic&srcc=ucs&pid=3805912f-e19f-44c3-bbfb-c3ec5c207f66&sid=b177a2c9-166f-4113-9b28-185bbe554807&utm_v=2
- Bartosz Kramek for Gazeta Wyborcza: "Law and Justice, Moldova - common cause" (29.04.2019): <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,24709867,w-zwalczaniu-fundacji-otwarty-dialog-pis-utworzyl-wspolny-front.html>
- Our statement regarding the slanderous article in *The Sunday Times* newspaper about the Open Dialogue Foundation dated 29 May 2019: <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/9278,statement-on-the-defamatory-article-in-the-sunday-times-about-the-open-dialogue-foundation>
- The Daily Beast: "Law and Justice went overseas to take care of business at home" (28.05.2019): <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/9301,the-daily-beast-law-and-justice-went-overseas-to-take-care-of-business-at-home>