

# Striking at the Open Dialog - a victory for Russia

Andrzej Wielowieyski

“There is certainly one country that does not like our organisation very much. It's Russia,” claims Andrzej Wielowieyski, a member of the Open Dialog Foundation Council.

At the request of the Polish authorities, Lyudmyla Kozlovska, President of the Open Dialog Foundation, who comes from Ukraine and who for many years has been running a foundation for the protection of human rights and political prisoners in the former Soviet republics, was entered by the Polish authorities into the Schengen Information System and deported from the EU. This came as a surprise, although it was known that the Polish authorities had decided to remove the foundation from Poland because Bartosz Kramek, the Chairman of the Foundation Council, wrote a strong speech in defence of the separation of powers in Poland.

## REST OF THE ARTICLE BELOW

During its nine years of existence, the Foundation has been effectively defending human rights in the East and engaging Western opinion, the Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the parliaments of EU countries. In Russia, but also especially in Kazakhstan, Moldova and Ukraine, a lot has been achieved: several dozen persecuted activists have been released, punishments have been mitigated, and numerous Members of the European Parliament have been engaged in the process – including Polish MEPs from both PiS and PO.

Such a strong attempt to block and nullify the work of the foundation, despite its unquestionable merits and achievements, is very surprising. There is certainly one country that does not like the Open Dialog Foundation very much. That country is Russia. However, the destruction of the ODF is certainly not beneficial to the EU or European unity. Striking at the Open Dialog is a victory for Russia.

Initially, the foundation organised the participation of Western parliamentarians in court meetings in the East. In particular, a lot of effort was spent defending oil workers after heavy strikes and severe repression in Kazakhstan. Dozens or even hundreds of people were arrested, but they were gradually released under pressure from the West. Contacts have also been made through OSCE meetings.

The foundation showed particular commitment during the Kiev revolution at Maidan. Help was organised for hundreds of volunteers from Poland. The Open Dialog was even permitted to supply protective equipment so that hundreds of bulletproof vests were brought to Kiev. Assistance was also provided to the population and refugees from the conflict areas in Donbas. The Foundation is involved in facilitating legal assistance and maintaining contact with several dozen Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia.

For a certain period, when organising fundraisers and integration meetings, the Foundation used large premises lent by the city of Warsaw (after the former “Nowy Świat” [New World] café). Significant support was given to the Foundation by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the bodies of the European Parliament, which in turn received a number

of detailed studies on the situation in individual countries (most recently: Moldova), as well as on individual events and persons. However, the Foundation employs a very small team – its resources are scant. The work is mainly carried out by volunteers and, in special cases, by experts (for small assignments). In the first years of its operation, the possibilities were greater thanks to the help of the wealthy family of Lyudmyla Kozlovska. Unfortunately, their property was in Crimea and was taken over by the Russians.

The Foundation can boast a particular success: the limitation of Interpol's activities in Europe in the area of prosecutions of activists from post-Soviet countries whose arrest is being sought by their countries. After long negotiations and research, it was decided that the citizens of the former Soviet Union countries would only be able to be detained after the consent of a competent local court had been obtained. Interpol has defended itself for a long time to maintain good relations with the “eastern” countries. In the end, however, they surrendered. It was a great success for the Open Dialog Foundation and Lyudmyla Kozlovska. Most post-Soviet countries have considerable trouble with opposition activists whom they are prosecuting and until only a few years ago, Interpol effectively helped to capture them and later deport them to their home countries.

*Andrzej Wielowieyski is a former parliamentarian and a member of the Open Dialog Foundation Council.*

Source: Rzeczpospolita

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