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THE
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Nobel Lecture

given by
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2021
Dmitry Muratov

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Antidote against tyranny

Honorable members of the Nobel Committee, honorable guests!

On the morning of October 8, I received a phone call from my mother. She wondered how things were going.

-Well, Mom, we've got the Nobel Prize ...

-That's nice. Anything else?

... Look here, mom I'll tell you everything.

“I am convinced that freedom of conscience, together with the other civic rights, provides the basis for progress.

I defend the thesis of the decisive significance of civic and political rights in moulding the destiny of mankind!

I am convinced that international confidence, <...> disarmament, and international security are inconceivable without an open society with freedom of information, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech <...>.

Peace, progress, human rights – these three goals are insolubly linked to one another.”

These words are a quote from the Nobel lecture of member of the Academy of Science Andrei Sakharov, a citizen of the world, a great thinker.

His wife Elena Bonner read it out here, in this place, on Thursday, December 11, 1975.

I felt an urge to repeat Sakharov's words here, in this world-famous hall.

Why is it important today for us, for me?

The world has fallen out of love for democracy anymore.

The world has become disappointed with the power elite.

The world has begun to turn to dictatorship.

We've got an illusion that progress can be achieved through technology and violence, not through human rights and freedoms.

This is progress without freedom?

It is as impossible as getting milk without having a cow.

The dictatorships have secured access to violence.

In our country (and not only) it is common to think that politicians who avoid bloodshed are weak.

While threatening the world with war is the duty of true patriots.

The powerful actively promote the idea of war.

Aggressive marketing of war affects people and they start thinking that war is acceptable.

Governments and their propaganda supporters are fully responsible for the militaristic rhetoric on state-owned television channels.

But there are other TV screens, that show honest and gruesome pictures. I have seen them.

During the Chechen war, five white refrigerator cars were placed on the railway track at a train station. They were guarded twenty-four hours a day. They were mortuaries on wheels that belonged to the Ministry of Defence's laboratory no. 124.

The refrigerator cars contained unidentified bodies of soldiers and officers.

Many of the bodies did not have faces as a result of direct hits or torture. The head of the laboratory, Commander Shcherbakov, did everything in his power to ensure that there were no unknown soldiers left. In a small house next to the train tracks there was a TV. Mothers and fathers of missing soldiers sat there, as if it were a waiting room. A cameraman sent pictures of the bodies to the screen. One at a time. 458 times. So many soldiers were lying in the berths of these carriages at minus 15 degrees on their last train trip from War to Death. Mothers who had been looking for their boys in the mountains and gorges of Chechnya saw their son's face on the screen and cried: "It's not him! It's not him, no!"

But it was.

Today's ideologues promote the idea of dying for your country and not living for your country. TV screens shall not fool us again. Let us remember what we saw on that little TV screen in the small room close to the railway cars filled with dead children.

Hybrid warfare and the tragic, ugly and criminal story of the Boeing MH17 have ruined relations between Russia and Ukraine, and I do not know if the next generations will be able to restore them ...

Moreover, in heads of some crazy geopoliticians, a war between Russia and Ukraine is not something impossible any longer. But I know that wars end with identifying soldiers and exchanging prisoners. During the Chechen war, Novaya Gazeta and our observer, Major Izmajlov, managed to free 174 people from captivity. If I, in my new

status, can do anything to bring home prisoners who are still alive, please say so. I'm ready.

I would like to mention another person who received the Nobel Peace Prize here in 1990.

Moscow. Kremlin, April 18, 1988. A meeting of the Politburo is in progress. One of the Soviet ministers demands that the military forces remain in Afghanistan.

Mikhail Gorbachev interrupts him abruptly: Stop your hawk squawk

Stop the hawk squawk

Isn't it a relevant ambition for politicians and journalists - to create a world without "killed in action" notes?

The events we see in the centre of Europe, in the Eastern Ukraine have been extended by a game, which is now turning into bloodshed, initiated by the the President of Belarus Lukashenko. His soldiers chase refugees who have come from the Middle East towards rows of guards armed with machine guns who protect the borders of the European Union. Both sides accuse one another, and the desperate people have literally come to a squeeze.

We are journalists, and our mission is clear - to distinguish between facts and fiction. The new generation of professional journalists knows how to work with big data and databases. By using these, we have found out whose airplanes are bringing refugees to the conflict area. The facts speak for themselves. The number of Belarusian flights from the Middle East to Minsk has more than quadrupled this autumn. 6 flights in the period August-November 2020 and 27 in the same period this year. The Belarusian airline company brought 4,500 people to possible crossing of the border this year, and only 600 last year. The same number - 6,000 refugees - came with an Iraqi airline company.

This is how armed provocations and conflicts arise. We journalists have uncovered how it is all organized, our task is accomplished. Now it is up to the politicians.

People for the state, or state for the people? That is the main conflict today. Stalin resolved this conflict through sweeping repressions.

The practice of torture in prisons and during investigation is also alive and well in today's Russia. Abuse, rape, terrible living conditions, ban on visits, ban on calling your mother on her birthday, endless extension of custody. Seriously ill people are locked up and beaten in custody, sick children are held hostage, and they are pressured to plead guilty without any evidence against them.

Criminal cases in our country are often based on false accusations and political motives. Opposition politician Alexei Navalny is being held in jail based on a false accusation from the CEO of the Russian branch of a big French cosmetics company. The accuser was somehow not summoned to the court or neither pleaded to be an aggrieved party. But Navalny is behind bars. The cosmetics company chose to step aside hoping that the odour from this case will not harm the scent of the company's products.

We hear more and more often about torture of convicts and detainees. People are being tortured to the breaking point, to make the prison sentence even more brutal. This is barbaric.

I am now presenting an initiative of setting up an international tribunal against torture, which will have the task to gather information on torture in different parts of the world and different countries, and to identify the executioners and the authorities involved in such crimes.

Of course, I shall rely first and foremost on investigative journalists around the world.

Torture must be recognized as the most serious crime against humanity.

By the way, Novaya Gazeta is still published on paper. So that people in prison can also read it since there is no internet in prisons.

There are two contradicting trends in Russia today.

On the one hand, Russia's president supports the erection of the monument to Sakharov's 100th anniversary.

On the other hand, Russia's Prosecutor General demands elimination of the international organization Memorial. Memorial provides recovery of victims of Stalin's repressions. And now the Prosecutor authority accuses Memorial in "violation of human rights"! One of the reasons may be that FSB has recently banned publishing personal data of the Stalin's prosecutors and executors.

But Memorial was established by Sakharov.
Memorial is not an "enemy of the people."
Memorial is a friend of the people.

Of course, we understand that the award today goes to the entire community of investigative journalists.

My colleagues have exposed money laundering schemes and ensured that billions of stolen rubles have been returned to the Treasury, they have revealed offshore accounts and stopped barbaric logging of Siberian forests. Finally, the state supported the efforts of Novaya Gazeta, Ekho of Moscow, Dozhd Rain TV and other outlets to provide treatment for children with rare diseases, who need the most expensive medicines in the world.

(By the way, I hope that the pharmaceutical industry which is able to help children and young adults with rare diseases including those with spinal muscle atrophy (SMA)), wants to talk to us.) Maybe they can open their wallets for available drugs and early diagnostics? Maybe the rich will find some money to help several tens of thousands of boys and girls whose heart is still beating?)

We pass on this award to help people who are ill, and to support independent journalism.

But journalism in Russia is going through a dark valley. Over a hundred journalists, media outlets, human rights defenders and NGOs have recently been branded as "foreign agents". In Russia, this means "enemies of the people." Many of our colleagues have lost their jobs. Some have to leave the country.

Some are deprived of the opportunity to live a normal life for an unknown period of time. Maybe forever... That has happened in our history before.

On September 29 next year, we will mark 100 years since the "philosophers' ship" sailed from St. Petersburg to Stettin in Germany, one of many in a row, when the Bolsheviks chased out almost 300 prominent intellectuals from Russia. Inventor of the helicopter Sikorsky, inventor of television Zvorykin, philosophers Frank, Ilyin and Pitirim Sorokin were aboard the "Oberbürgermeister Haken" going to exile. Among them there also was the great thinker Nikolai Berdyaev. Like others, he was allowed to bring his pajamas, two shirts, two pairs of socks and a winter coat. This

is how the motherland said goodbye to its great citizens: Leave your things behind but take your brain with you.

The same thing is happening with journalists and human rights defenders today. The "philosophers' ship" has been replaced by the "journalist plane". This is of course a metaphor, but dozens of journalists are leaving Russia. But some have been deprived even of this opportunity.

Russian journalists Orkhan Dzhemal, Kirill Radchenko, Alexander Rastorguyev, were brutally shot in the Central African Republic where they were investigating activity of a private Russian military company. Orkhan's widow, Ira Gordienko, works for Novaya Gazeta. Since the day of the murder June 30th 2018, she has revealed lies in the official investigation. Here is one of the details: Invaluable material evidence - the victims' clothes - were burned by the police! The Russian investigation has not achieved any results. Not an international investigation either. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres has promised to assist in the investigation. He might have forgotten his promise. This is just a reminder.

... I can probably - as always - get questions like: why did your colleagues go there? Yes, to witness. To prove. To see it with their own eyes. Because as the great war photographer Robert Capa said: "If your picture isn't good enough, you aren't close enough."

"Are not you afraid?" is the most common question my colleagues get. But this is their mission. As governments continually improve the past, journalists try to improve the future.

So this award is for all true journalism. This award is to my colleagues from Novaya Gazeta, who have lost their lives - Igor Domnikov, Yuri Shchekotschikhin, Anna Politkovskaya, Anastasija Baburova, Stas Markelov and Natasha Estemirova. This award is also to the colleagues who are alive, to the professional community who perform their professional duty.

... The day before the award was announced, we marked the 15th anniversary of Anna Politkovskaya's murder. The killers were convicted, but the mastermind of the crime has not yet been found, and now the statute of limitations has expired. I hereby declare officially: The editor staff of Novaya Gazeta do not recognize this limitation expiry.

There is a saying in Russian and English and other languages: "When the dogs bark, but the caravan keeps walking." One explanation is that nothing can hinder the progress of a caravan. The government sometimes derisively say the same about journalists. They bark, but it does not affect anything.

But I was recently told that the saying has an opposite explanation.

The caravan drives forward because the dog's bark.

They growl and savage the predators in the mountains and the desert. The caravan can move forward only with the dogs around.

Yes, we growl and bite. Yes, we have sharp teeth and strong grip.

But we are the prerequisite for progress.

We are the antidote against tyranny.

PS:

I wanted to save a minute of time.

Let us rise and honour my and Maria Ressa's reporter colleagues, who have given their lives for this profession, with a minute of silence, and let us give our support to those who suffer persecution.

I want journalists to die old.