



Directorate General for Communication
Directorate A - Media
Audiovisual Unit

SAKHAROV PRIZE 2009

Interview with Oleg Petrovich Orlov (MEMORIAL)

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I. on being nominated for Sakharov Prize

00:00 - 00:29

Now Natasha Estemirova has been murdered, and it was so clear that this awakens strong public resentment around the world, because Natasha was an awardee of various prizes... by the way, Natasha has been nominated for the Sakharov's Prize, too. She wasn't honored with it then... So, you see, it is pleasant to have recognition, but it doesn't enhance one's security.

II. on Natasha Estemirova

00:30 - 00:56

I also have some other considerations ... it was Natasha who had to receive it, Natasha. She didn't receive it, she was killed. Now, if we are awarded this Prize, we shall receive it... but there's some bitterness in it, that it is not for Natasha – she hasn't received it, she has received a bullet instead.

III. on impact of Sakharov, former leader of the organisation.

00:58 - 01:23

It was his very personality – it had certainly effected me in a big way, because even before the Memorial times I knew Sakharov's name, and it was very significant for

me before the perestroika. When he had become the Head of the Memorial, I felt great responsibility.

IV. on the role of human rights organizations in Russia.

01:24 - 01:59

It is very important for Russia now to have the human rights organizations in order to educate our society, to nurture the feeling that people can defend themselves by using the Law. You see, there was a moment when it seemed that we were moving in this direction, that our country, our society, our state were evolving that way.

V. on the situation in Russia.

02:01 - 02:38

Now it all rolls backwards, despite all the words that president Medvedev says about the civil society, in reality the vertical I was talking about, is being set forth, and the state is becoming more and more all-embracing. The state is all, and the individual in on their own, they are atomized, and there is only the state around and above them. How can this little cog in the machine appeal to the state, ask the state for something? And there is no alternative.

02:40 - 03:28

And there are no elections as they are, as you can see. There is an imitation of elections. This atomization is happening again. This is what the communist regime achieved during the long period of its supremacy – the complete atomization of the society.... Now it is happening again, which is very bad: Russia has no future without a real civil society. I dread that if it goes as it goes now, than sooner or later Russia will be destined to have what Soviet Union had. This is terrible.

VI. on obstacles to their work, Russian courts, authorities.

03:31 - 04:35

What hampers our work is the impossibility to reach an effective result within the frames of the due course of law. In the period of perestroika and post-perestroika period we were able to achieve quite a lot then, our country was undergoing the real reconstruction. The foundation of everything good that we have now, was laid then... we have managed to set up the governance mechanisms – they were brought into being! With their help one could carry one's point – and to struggle for it in court... And our further task, as we saw it, was to really protect people with the help of this system – this was what the mechanisms and procedures of law were for.

04:37 - 05:29

Now it turns out, that they do not work – not because they are wrong... No, it is all written out nicely. It doesn't work, because it simply doesn't work. Because the courts adopt unjust decisions, because investigative authorities do not intend to investigate crime... they sabotage, simply sabotage – and the appeals to public prosecutor's office against investigative authorities lead to nothing. It is clear, that... All problems start at the top. There is neither political willingness nor political will here to make these mechanisms work, on the contrary, there is political willingness to make everything lose meaning, to turn them into a dummy.

VII. on difficult work in Northern Caucasus, new law on NGOs.

05:30 - 06:48

I'd say that it is certainly harder to work now, much more harder. We don't know how we can work in Chechnya. We have put our work on hold there, because we have to consider the safety of our friends and colleagues. It is also dangerous in other regions in the Northern Caucasus. In Dagestan the leaflets with life threats were spread around – the names of our colleagues are listed there. And here... the new law on NGOs was adopted few years ago, and a number of issues make it a draconian law. It gives our state the right to interfere in our activities on no grounds, to check how much our moves correlate with the statute of our own organization, with our goal.

VIII. on his hopes for future.

06:50 - 07:51

I would like to hope that our society will finally awaken. This is what I'd want to happen very much. I can't say that we find ourselves in something of a vacuum, no – there is an aura of people around the Memorial, who are compassionate and helpful, although they are not the members of the organization. We are together. I can't say that we lack the inflow of the young energy – the young people come to work to the human rights center, we have volunteers, but... the broader audience is partly hostile and partly is still asleep.