

Oleg Orlov

Oleg Orlov was born on April 4th, 1953 in Moscow, the son of an engineer and a schoolteacher. He came from a family tradition of quiet but firm political contentiousness in response to Communism. His maternal grandfather, Nikolai Radchenko, worked in one of the Moscow factories of the 1930s, where the GPU (General Political Dpt of NKVD) attempted to persuade him to collaborate. Radchenko was, however, able to deftly avoid answering the GPU's demands in either the affirmative (thus betraying everyone) or the negative (therefore subjecting his family to repression). Orlov's father, a staunch anti-communist, meanwhile, stood in the ranks of the Communist party. Unable, as child, to accept his father's anti-communist sidings, Orlov eventually embraced the same political views.

In 1976 Orlov graduated from Moscow State University with a degree in plant physiology. Upon completing his studies Orlov worked in the laboratories and vivaria at the Institute of Plant Physiology at the Soviet Academy of Science. Orlov subsequently wrote his dissertation but eventually decided not to defend it, leaving off work in the sciences in 1991.

It was in 1979 that Orlov began his political action, producing, during the course of two years, pamphlets that shed light on the newly commenced war in Afghanistan, the situation in Poland, and the activity of the movement "Solidarity". In 1988, Orlov became one of the first members of the new initiative Memorial, which had the goal at the time of its inception was the public disclosure of repression in the USSR, and the freedom of political prisoners. Subsequently, he took part in the foundation of the All-Soviet-Union free historical education society Memorial. In the years 1988-1989 he actively took part in the preparation and organization of Memorial's conferences. The movement was incorporated in 1991 and renamed the International historical-education human rights and charitable society Memorial. Orlov became member of the Board of the Society. After the development of the International Memorial a separate NGO dealing with contemporary human rights issues was created - Human Rights Center Memorial of which Oleg Orlov became Head of Council. He has been in the hot spots of Nagorny Karabakh and Transdnistria, where he observed both sides of the conflicts. Orlov also appeared on the radio broadcasts on the station "Russia" to discuss the issue of human rights.

In 1990 Orlov took part in the electoral group "Election-90" as the authorized representative of Sergei Kovalev in the Soviet Supreme Council elections; after Kavelev's election Orlov worked in the Council as a leading expert on human rights. Between 1991 and 1993 Orlov worked on the humanization of laws governing the penitentiary system, the exculpation (political rehabilitation) victims of repression, and human rights questions in the areas of armed conflicts within the USSR. Starting in 1994 Orlov, along with Kovalev, the then chairman of the Russian Presidential committee on human rights, worked in war-torn Chechnya, where he personally met with the Chechen leaders Djohar Dudaev and Aslan Mashadov, took part in prisoner exchange negotiations, as well as inspected the hospitals and camps for prisoners of war. In 1995 in Budennovsk, when insurgents lead by Shamil Basaev managed to capture one and a half thousand hostages, a group of negotiators that included Orlov and was led by Kovalev managed to secure the release of 111 women and children. Subsequently, Orlov and the Human Rights Center Memorial devoted a great deal of attention to kidnappings and abductions in the Caucasus and victims among the populations of Chechnya and Ingushetia.

In 2004 Orlov became a member of a Committee under the President of the Russian Federation on the development of civil society institutes and human rights headed by Ella Pamfilova. In 2006 the human rights activist left the committee in protest over comments made by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, about the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya that the murder caused more damage to the reputation of the country than anything she ever wrote. Likewise, Orlov was a

member of group for the unification of civil and economic rights United Effort and also, in 2006, entered the coordinating council of the Russian anti-fascist front. In this second post he spoke out against the activity of Aleksander Belov who led the “Movement against Illegal Immigrants (DPHE) and the harassment of the people from Caucasus in Moscow.

2007 saw an increase in the number of abductions and murders of the peaceful citizens of Ingushetia under the rule of president Murat Zyazikov. A report readily made by Memorial titled “Ingushetia in 2007: What Is Coming Next?” detailed the situation in the north Caucasian republic as near catastrophic. On November 23, 2007 Orlov, along with reporters of the TV company REN-TV was abducted from the hotel “Assa” in Ingushetia's capital Nazran. The next morning they were found beaten near Nesterovskaya station. Orlov announced that they had been abducted by forces allegedly associated with governmental law enforcement institutions dissatisfied with Memorial's support of the local opposition.

On July 15th, 2009 a member of the HRC Memorial, Natalia Estemirova, was brutally murdered. Orlov placed the blame of Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov, asserting that Kadyrov considered her a personal enemy and threatened her. The Chechen leader contested the accusations and even personally called Orlov in order to persuade him to retract his statement – after which he sued the human rights leader for libel and appealed to incite criminal action against Orlov for his alleged slander.

There after, Orlov announced the suspension of Memorial's Chechen offices “on account of the hostile relations with the republic's administration”.

The Chechen President's civil suit took place in the Tverskoi district court of Moscow on September 25th. On October 6th the court partly satisfied Kadirov's claims, calling the defendant to disclaim his statements and payment of 50,000 rubles to the plaintiff by Memorial and 20,000 rubles by Orlov. After the decision Orlov and Memorial filed an appeal.

On October 27th, 2009 a criminal case against Oleg Orlov was initiated. The investigation is on-going.

In October 2009 the European Parliament awarded Memorial and its three representatives Oleg Orlov, Sergey Kovalev, Lyudmila Alexeeva the Andrey Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.