

WELCOME

Welcome everyone. Today is the 3rd of May, World Press Freedom Day, and I am very honored to deliver the laudatio to Elena Milashina.

We couldn't ask for a better recipient for this occasion.

You are a young, Russian investigative journalist at the bi-weekly independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta where you have relentlessly covered the most sensitive issues in Russia.

Among these, we can mention

- the catastrophe of the submarine Kursk,
- the hostage crisis in Moscow in 2002 as well as in Beslan in 2004,
- the atrocities of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict in South Ossetia and,
- **last but not least**, the endless human rights violations in Chechnya, such as torture, extra judicial executions, enforced disappearances, violations of women's rights. Most recently, you have disclosed the big wave of repression against the Chechen LGBT community in the spring of 2017 and this past January. You also cover the case against **Oyub Titiev**, the head of the Chechen branch of the Russian Human Rights NGO Memorial, who is currently detained. He was the last independent NGO HR defender to try to work in Chechnya. And you continue investigating into the murder of Natalya Estemirova.

By awarding you this title, we would also like to **pay tribute to all journalists** who bravely pursue the truth, regardless of threat, risks and danger.

According to the Committee to protect Journalists, 58 Russian journalists have been murdered since 1992 because of their work. Among them, 6 had been working at Novaya Gazeta.

Let's mention them: Anna Politkovskaya, Natalya Estemirova, Igor Domnikov, Anastasia Baburova, Yuri Chekochikhin. All of them were investigating sensitive issues. Stas Markelov, a lawyer who was a member of the board of Novaya Gazeta, was also murdered.

Their portraits are hanging in the entrance hall of Novaya Gazeta, A memorial to Anna Politkovskaya stands outside at the entrance of the building.

Novaya Gazeta, one of the last independent newspapers in Russia, has been subjected to multiple threats, including a funeral wreath and goat's head left on their doors.

By covering Chechnya, you are bravely following the professional engagement of Anna Politkovskaya and Natalya Estemirova.

Anna was murdered in broad day light in Moscow in October 2006 after documenting torture perpetrated by the Chechen authorities. Natalya was murdered in 2009 after investigating highly sensitive cases in Chechnya.

Our students of the ULB had the enormous opportunity to listen to Natalya's testimony one month after Anna was murdered. Natalya came to Brussels and delivered a lecture along with other Russian Human Rights Defenders. Her testimony was powerful and impressive. The students were left speechless.

Anna and Natalya would have been proud to see you here today.

By supporting you and your courageous work, we express- and repeat again- our support for all the brave journalists that continue to publish and disclose stories about living under an authoritarian and quasi totalitarian regimes such as Chechnya.

And to our journalism students, I say keep always the example of Elena in mind. Regardless of the threat, risks and danger she faces, journalists like her keep pursuing the truth. Thanks to her work, Russian society can be kept informed even if it is a constant struggle. Thanks to her work and the work of her colleagues, us here in the EU

can also know about what happens in Russia and specifically in Chechnya, where independent NGOs can no longer work.

These journalists deserve all of our admiration and support; without them neither their fellow citizens, nor the world would know the truth. Without them, there would be neither dignity nor hope. All of these journalists help us in the EU to keep our eyes open and to be aware of what is happening in authoritarian countries, and in turn what is happening in our own democracies, which themselves are increasingly fragile.

THANK ELENA

WE SUPPORT YOU

DON'T GIVE UP